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SHOT!

OR

THE GHOST'S SEAT AT DEYMONT.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

BY

FREDERICK SHERIDAN,

Author of "Cecil Forrester."

"Be sure your sin will find you out."

NUMB. xxxii. 23.

VOL. I.

London :

T. CAUTLEY NEWBY, PUBLISHER,
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S H O T !

CHAPTER I.

It is a few months ago now since, casually passing a night at the little village of Deymont, in —shire, I overheard a conversation, which aroused my curiosity, having reference to a murder committed many years before. A murder enveloped, as it seemed to me, with more than usual mystery, and accompanied with more than usual sorrow. Its perpetrator moreover had, till within the last few weeks, remained undiscovered. I made enquiries, slight at first,—more closely as I progressed. I

Gen. New Ray 12 July 55 Montpelier = 24.

visited the places, the locality of which it was necessary that I should be acquainted with ; I obtained an introduction to those persons mentioned in the following pages, who were still alive. From portraits I trust that I am able to give a not inaccurate description of those who have passed away. In a word, I have spared no pains,—spent no little time,—in endeavouring to reproduce exactly as they occurred the facts which I am about to narrate. I have only to add that, from reasons which will be obvious to everyone, I have in most cases altered the names of both persons and places, and that I have omitted altogether the name of the county in which these events occurred.

* * * * *

About thirteen years ago a gentleman was busily engaged in his lodgings in South Street, packing up his things, apparently for a visit to the country.

It was a cold winter morning in January, and the snow fell thick and fast; in the streets horses were slipping and falling, and poor frozen-out workmen sheltering themselves under any chance portico from the ceaseless drifting snow.

The wind was sighing plaintively as it whistled round the corners of the street, driving the fleecy snow before it. Here and there, where some obtrusive wall had withstood it to its face, it had hurled the snow, flake after flake, on a heap, and the cold drift had accumulated till it had become a little mountain of snow.

Thither came the boys,—what do London boys prefer to snow? There they made their most slippery slides, and watched the poor old gentlemen's alarm, when they stepped unwarily upon them. There they dared their most daring deeds—deeds of daring too; for here was ammunition enough to last a siege, and hence, in the event of a fierce onslaught

of bobbies, they had a safe retreat down a neighbouring mews.

They were generals, in a way, those boys; they knew the value of supplies,—they knew the value of keeping their communications open,—they knew the value of arresting the enemy's progress by obstacles, such as slides.

What was the art of Vauban or Napoleon but an adaptation of this rude knowledge?

You could have seen all this from that little room in South Street: aye, and more too, for you might have watched that poor shivering woman, drawing her tattered apology for a shawl more tightly round her, and begging of each careless passer-by the copper without which she must go supperless to bed,—nay, nay, not to bed, but to walk through those cold, bitter streets,—walk all night in an agony of cold.

Oh, where is poverty to be found in so gaunt, so hideous a form as in this great, rich,

prosperous city?—where can cold be so bitter, as in view of the warm blazing fire?—where can wet be so dreary as when it is surrounded by unavailing shelter?—where can hunger be so galling as in sight of the baker's window, the butcher's counter, or where the smell of the rich repast rises to mock the poor famished wretch, who begs,—aye vainly begs,—the crumbs which fall from the rich man's table?

Were the sufferings of Tantalus greater than these?

But that room in South Street,—it was pleasant and comfortable enough, for there was a cheerful fire burning in the grate, and not a breath of the cold air could find its way in through the closed window.

It was a small, comfortably furnished room on the first floor: a rather worn carpet, and rather old heavy curtains. In the centre there was a table, close to it a comfortable arm-chair, opposite that again a sofa. Sofa,

chair, and table, they all told a tale of what was going on ; they were all covered with clothes, guns, flasks, and whips, waiting to be packed up.

The room was hung with some half-dozen pictures,—two of these were hunting scraps, a third the famous finish between Voltigeur and Flying Dutchman ; Laura Bell's portrait was the fourth, face to face with the great duke ; a pretty view of Eton from the river, and a sketch of an old castellated house, with the word "Sturdith" written underneath it, were the two last.

There were not many more books in the room than there were pictures ; such as there were, were placed in rude order on a slide on a writing table. A Don Quixote and a Bible, a Field Exercise book, three green novels, a few volumes of Scott, 'In Memoriam,' a Johnson's Dictionary, and some dozen others, —apparently neither much used nor much cared for.

The room opened into an inner room, a bedroom. It is not worth while going into this, except to introduce you to the persons who happened at that moment to have gone into it.

There were two persons in the room, master and man,—little need of saying which was the master, and which was the man. He, the tallest and broadest of the two, standing some six feet two in his stockings, with a chest and arm that would have shamed Guy Livingstone, a fresh—I had almost written florid—complexion, a thick moustache on the upper lip, the lower closely shaven, a coarse bull neck, and a firm lip, was the master, Herbert Lawless, Captain and Lieutenant-Colonel in Her Majesty's Regiment of — Guards.

My hero? nay, no hero of mine, though one whom he, who reads this history, will hear much of, and therefore, if he is worth knowing at all, worth a little more than a mere passing introduction at the first outset.

You could make a shrewd guess of the man's character by merely looking at his face. He was a man whose word there was no disputing. "Move off that gate," said he one day to three hulking fellows whom he suspected of wrong. "Who says so?" was the impertinent rejoinder of the biggest of the three. "I do," was Lawless' answer, and they slunk away.

His face had been bronzed with constant out-door exercise, for to field sports he had been heartily attached for twenty years,—ever since, in fact, as a boy of six, he had made his debut with the H. H. on Castanet?—what a rare galloper that little pony was, and had managed to see the end of a twelve miles' run over a fair hunting country.

It was ten years after that maiden gallop on Castanet that, one dark winter's night, there was a report of a gun in the home woods at Sturdith, and though a mere lad of sixteen, he turned out, and joining his keepers

at the mill on the lower end of the wood, led them himself to search for the poachers.

I have heard the keeper, who was with him that night, say that they had not gone far before they fell in with three of the gang, and had a sharp tussle, and succeeded in taking two of them. The third, the strongest and most active of the gang, after braining one of the helpers with the butt end of his gun, turned round and bolted right across some heavy ploughed land towards Hicklebury. Young Lawless only waited two moments to bid the keepers secure the other two and was after the fellow.

It was a long chase, for the poacher knew the ground best, but Lawless had won the steeple chase at Eton, and was not to be beaten by a poacher. For three miles the chase lasted, and then the poacher turned to bay.

Lawless remembered little more after that than rushing at the fellow, and feeling the

warm blood trickling down his face from a fearful blow which the poacher received him with. But the keeper says that when he came up, five minutes afterwards, the young master was sticking to the fellow like a bull terrier, though he was so exhausted from the loss of blood that he fainted immediately afterwards. You can still see the mark of the poacher's handiwork on Lawless' forehead.

But I think that I can tell Lawless' character from another anecdote. One wet day he was reading the "Lord of the Isles"—Scott's poetry he was always partial to—

"Vain was then the Douglas band,
Vain the Campbell's vaunted hand,
Vain Kirkpatrick's bloody dirk,
Making sure of murder's work."

Something tempted him to turn to the notes, and he repeated aloud, with a sneer, Bruce's speech, "Bad tidings, I doubt I have slain Comyn." "Ah," said his tutor, who happened to overhear him, "that was, indeed,

a foul spot on Bruce's fair fame." "He was a fool," was Lawless' answer, "I should have been ashamed to have come away and left the deed half-done."

Verily, I believe that, had Lawless struck the first blow, Kirkpatrick would never have had an opportunity of earning his motto.

For he came from a hard hitting stock, did this Lawless. His father, who ran away with Miss Deymont, and so obtained old Sturdith Castle,—much to the horror of my Lord Deymont.—But I shall explain this afterwards. His father lost an arm in the retreat on Torres Vedras, but right well did he repay the blow. I am told that, rising in his stirrups, he swung his sword over his head, and with one blow cut through helmet and head of the French cuirassier. "Give as much as you receive," was his constant maxim, and he acted up to it when he repaid with such good interest the stroke of the French cuirassier.

Methinks I can see him now—his left sleeve hanging at his side—mounted on a plain Irish nag, the straightest and hardest goer in all the hunt. A mad, hot-headed fellow to the very end of his days. His maddest act was his last. To ride at a pike-gate, which the collector closed, after a three miles burst. He was on Crazy Jane that morning—poor old mare! Many a fall she and her master had had together, but never such a one as this on that hard turnpike road. Poor old mare! they had to shoot her, for her back was broken. Shoot her while her master lay senseless in old Style's, at Brook Green,—for he never spoke again, though he lived, if insensibility can be called life, for six hours after his fall.

His son, Herbert, was only ten years old when this happened. He was, indeed, an orphan, for his birth had cost his mother her life. But Lord Deymont, possibly for his mother's sake, for he never forgave the father

for his marriage, was kind to the lad; had him often staying with him at Deymont; ran down to see him at Eton; in fact, acted as a father to him.

Perhaps, after reading the next chapter, you will think that his lordship had some motive in patronising his young kinsfolk. If so, you will be wrong. What Lord Deymont did, he did from sheer good nature, and, if there was any other reason, from a remembrance of the lad's mother.

Reader, I have now introduced you to Herbert Lawless. I must again repeat, not to my hero. For, indeed, in this tale of mine, there is no hero and no heroine. 'Tis a history of many people,—not of any one.

But as you will see, perhaps, more of Lawless than of anyone else, I thought it right to set out by stating most emphatically that he is not my hero.

His servant was a man of some inches less both in height and in girth—of an unpleasant

countenance, and uninviting manner. He was a soldier-servant, and had all the type, all the low-breeding, of a soldier-servant about him; yet he was useful to Lawless. Not too proud, as some servants are, to perform the most menial occupation; and yet withal a man who was capable, on an emergency, of being trusted with business of a somewhat delicate nature. A quick loader, and passionately addicted to shooting; a good rough-rider, and knowing about a horse. Some share of Lawless' success in steeple-chasing was due to his servant's skill.

They were packing—the master and the servant,—packing, as I said before, in preparation for a journey into the country. What a mystery packing is. In what confusion shirts, collars, and trousers were jumbled together, 'under Lawless' hasty exertions; and with what regularity and smoothness they were arranged by his ready and careful servant.

Lawless had just written a direction, and had given it to his servant. It ran thus:—

CAPTAIN LAWLESS,
Marquis of Deymont's,
Deymont,
Spinwell.

CHAPTER II.

THOSE who have travelled—and in this railway age who has not?—by the South Western Line to Southampton, probably remember the station at Hicklebury, where the branch to the large town of Spinwell turns off; and if they have waited, as the trains generally do, for a quarter of an hour at the Junction, they probably have made some enquiries about the old house at Deymont, Lord Deymont's country seat, which all the world knows is only about six miles from Hicklebury.

For a queer, rambling old building is that

house at Deymont. It must have been once, in the old feudal days, but a small castle, and much of that little has been pulled down to make room for improvements and additions. The greater part of the present building was erected towards the end of the sixteenth century, and the best rooms in the whole house are those which were added then.

But the first Lord Deymont—he was created by Charles the Second—had been up to London, and became enamoured of a certain banquet chamber at Whitehall, which had not been erected many years then; and nothing could satisfy him but to tack a chapel on to his own house at Deymont, built, as it seems to me, in rather poor imitation of Inigo Jones' great work, but 'twas thought mighty fine at the time, and the simple country folk did not object to the strange union of Norman, Elizabethan, and Italian styles of architecture, thus combined in Deymont House.

But if the house is very doubtfully admirable, the park is well worthy of the head of even so old a family as the Deymonts. I know no finer trees than I can show you in this park. There is an oak avenue—flanking for half a mile the road that leads from Hicklebury Lodge to the house—in which there are a dozen trees, for each of which, in the heat of the old war, Mr. Turntool—he was made Sir John afterwards, and was elected M.P. for Southampton—offered my lord of that day a thousand pounds. But my lord was too fond of his old oaks to part with them, even for a thousand pounds, and so, honoured be his memory for it! the glorious old trees are still standing.

There is many a pretty drive, and many a pretty spot, in the deer park at Deymont, besides the oak avenue, but I took you at once to the old trees, for they will give you a good idea of Deymont Park.

For eight centuries has Deymont been the

property of the Deymonts. The land was granted originally by the first William to one Robert, a hard-headed Norman, who had fought under him at Hastings, but it is not until one hundred years later that I find any further mention of any of the house. Not until the time of that Geoffrey the Ready, who rode in beside the Earl of Gloucester into Arundel Castle, when Adelaide of Louvain opened the gates to Matilda. "Madam," so the tradition runs, said the Earl, "The Prince shall soon be our King." "*Madame*," exclaimed Geoffrey, speaking in French, "*il est déjà mon roi*." It is thought, I cannot say how truly, that the name Deymont is a corruption of this speech. It is, at any rate, certain that it was assumed by Geoffrey's son, a hard-hitting, give and take fellow, who fought in the great battle near Alnwick. No wonder then that so strenuous a supporter of the throne should have gloried in his father's loyal speech.

It is in memory, it is believed, of this staunch old Plantagenet that the Deymonts assumed the single word "Ready" for their motto.

From what I have said, it will be seen that the Deymonts, even before they bore that name, were no powerless chieftains. All the broad acres, that surround Deymont now, belonged to them then, and part of the old house had been erected before those days.

It was the lineal representative of these Deymonts, who was a favourite companion of the Black Prince, a doughty knight, ready for any daring deed. In acknowledgment of his prowess, he was made, about the time of the peace of Bretigny, Lord Sturdith, and was presented by his prince with a yet more substantial thank-offering—no less a present than Sturdith Castle and its vast domains. Sturdith is only ten miles from Deymont. It is almost equal to the latter in extent; but, notwithstanding the source from which the gift had come, Lord Sturdith had preferred

his old inheritance of Deymont ; and had left Deymont to his eldest, and Sturdith to his second son.

Time had not severed the two families which had thus been formed from each other. Till within the last few years neither had wanted a male inheritor of the property. Judicious intermarriages, constantly recurring, had united the kindred properties so closely to each other, that Lord Sturdith of Deymont had hardly ever been removed by more than a second cousinship from the owner of Sturdith.

But time had effected other alterations. Charles II. had made Lord Sturdith Earl of Deymont. George III. had exalted the earldom into a marquissate. Three times a Lord Deymont had been taken into the councils of his sovereign. Three times the coveted garter had been bound on the knee of the chief of the house.

The first Marquis of Deymont—he was a

friend of Lord Bute's, and owed his advancement to his staunch allegiance to that minister—married Rose Deymont, sister to Mr. Deymont, of Sturdith. You will see that the marriage was important when I tell you that her brother—there were only two children—died from a fall while out hunting, soon after his marriage, and only left one child, a daughter. Lady Deymont, the first marchioness, had only this little girl between her and all the Sturdith estates, so that there was some consolation, especially as the girl was weakly, notwithstanding that the event which for five centuries, generation after generation of Deymonts had been dreading, had at last taken place,—that a girl was the heiress of Sturdith.

But when the girl grew out of her early sicknesses, she showed no symptoms of an intention of dying, as she ought to have done. My Lord Deymont, the second marquis—for by this time Lord Bute's friend was dead—

grew uneasy. For, the deuce take it! the girl might marry. Marry, why not?—into some other family. Some peer without an estate, some duke without a dukedom, and sever Deymont and Sturdith for ever.

Perhaps it was filial obedience that made his son—who at the time my story opens, nearly thirty years afterwards, was third marquis—perhaps, I say, it was filial obedience, or perhaps it was family tradition, that made his son propose to the heiress of Sturdith; but, indeed, it did not require very much obedience; it could have cost no one much effort to love the light, graceful beauty, richer even in the charms that nature had so unsparingly lavished on her, than in the vast possessions that were so soon to be her own.

Surely there could have been no better union than this. There was one insuperable objection to it, though—one which the old peer had never dreamed of. Miss Deymont was foolish enough, nay, wicked enough, to

forget that she was a Deymont, to forget the traditions of the Deymonts, and to refuse her cousin's hand.

The old peer never held his head up after that; but he died—died of a broken heart, when the last news came that his niece had fallen in love with and married a penniless Captain of Dragoons—a casual acquaintance at a ball, a man of no family, no property, no expectations, an Irishman to boot—Captain Lawless.

The old peer, as I have said, died. His son, the third marquis, having fretted over his disappointment for a year, and mourned his father another year, married, and married well, a few months after his cousin Mrs. Lawless' death in her confinement. Poor thing! She just lived to see, to kiss, and to bless her only child.

Six and twenty years had passed since that day. Out of four children which Lord Deymont had had, two had survived. The eldest,

Lord Sturdith, was but little more than of age. He had passed through Eton creditably. At college he had earned well-merited honours, and in the last few months he had been called to more serious duties, by being returned to Parliament as member for the county.

The other child, a daughter, Lady Clementina Deymont, was but just eighteen. The year before she had made her *début* in London, and old superannuated beaux had longed for youth again, and penniless young men had sighed for means — means large enough to allow them to aspire to win Lady Clementina's hand.

And it was a prize that was worth winning — that bright, cheerful girl. What though there were others whose features were more regular, whose hair was more auburn, whose ankle was even better shaped, where was there so bright a smile, such happy, twinkling blue eyes, such matchless irregularity of

feature? What if her teeth were not so white as those of others? you would have never dreamed of thinking that they spoilt her beauty. What though there were others who could play better, sing better—others more accomplished? It was a part of her happy nature to warble rather than sing, to have a smattering and not a knowledge of art. It was a nature to love for its own bright, happy self, and not for the added accomplishments of this restless world.

The child whose birth had cost Mrs. Lawless her life had grown, as the reader has probably anticipated, into the Captain Lawless who has already been introduced. Much indeed depended on his life. You had to carry your finger up three generations of his genealogy before you could find on whom his strictly entailed estate would, on his death, devolve. You had to carry your finger up to that Miss Deymont of Sturdith, who, upwards of sixty years before, had married the first marquis.

So that, in the event of Captain Lawless' death, the two properties would have been united under her heir—Lord Deymont.

And, anxious as Lord Deymont was to prevent the separation of these two properties, he might almost have been excused if at times he had had a lingering hope that his gallant cousin would be carried off at a premature age—carried off perhaps by a gallant death, a death worthy of an Englishman, of a soldier, and of a descendant of the Deymonts.

I have said *might*, for in reality his lordship had never wished any such thing. He had for years cherished a scheme—cherished it so fondly that, notwithstanding his own early experiences, he had never regarded the difficulties of its accomplishment—of a very different nature. Lawless should marry Lady Clementina—perhaps even take the name of Deymont—but he should marry Lady Clementina. Nothing was more pro-

bable. Lawless was liked by everyone; Clementina was universally admired. In town, Lord Deymont took care that no one should be asked to his house more than Lawless. In the country Lawless was his nearest neighbour. Could there be anything more probable, anything more desirable, than a marriage between Captain Lawless and Lady Clementina Deymont?

Yet a little more, before I finish this long introductory chapter.

Lord Deymont had had one brother, a brother who had died long ago, but had left two orphan children and a few thousand pounds, on which these two children had struggled on. They were a boy and a girl—Guy and Marion Deymont.

Guy Deymont was a few months younger than Lord Sturdith. He was of middle height, handsome, with a small, piercing blue eye, a commanding forehead, Roman nose, and a firm, masterly mouth. He

had left Eton, where he had been his rival, at the same time as Lord Sturdith, but, instead of accompanying the latter to Oxford, he had gone to Cambridge, where he had taken a respectable, though not very distinguished, degree. But he had shown more promise than his place in the class list suggested. He had won more than one prize for declamations and essays, which proved that the young man had already dived deep into the hidden intricacies of English History, and had eagerly sought, amidst a dunghill of rubbish, for the rare gems of English literature. Leaving Cambridge, he had gone to the bar, and though he had but just been called, and was still a briefless barrister, his untiring energy had gained him no little knowledge of jurisprudence, and had paved the way to his attaining the position, no inconsiderable one for so young a man, which he has acquired at the bar in the twelve years which have elapsed since then.

His sister, Marion Deymont, was of the same age as her cousin—Lady Clementina. Like the latter, she had come out the year before. And the penniless girl had made almost a greater sensation than her rich cousin. I have two photographs of Miss Deymont before me, but I wish that I had the photographer's art to reproduce on this page the most engaging beauty that my eye ever gazed on. A tall commanding figure, just in every proportion, and graceful in every motion, ankles exquisitely turned, hands delicately small. Oh! if you had not even seen her face, you would have loved that figure.

Those photographs I have before me—the one I like the best, is that in which she is sitting at a table, having just raised her eyes from a book which she has been reading. Light auburn hair, drawn enough from off her face to allow her ear to peep from those tresses; light auburn hair nestles in a rippling line on a front as matchlessly formed

as every other portion of her head. Eyebrows, and long silken eyelashes of the same hue, shade two light blue eyes. Her lips are just parted, and you can just catch a glimpse of the white teeth they guard so jealously ; and confess that every feature is a model of regularity—a model worthy of a sculptor's study. But be with her a little longer, and see her bright complexion ; watch her winning smile ; hear the music of her voice, and own that, though my poor description is at fault, I have a gem for my heroine.

CHAPTER III.

PROBABLY all of us have, at one time or another, undertaken a long journey on a cold, snowy day. We have all done the same thing; wrapped ourselves up in the same manner; growled in the same ill-humour on being forced to dive for our ticket. Probably all of us purchased a *Times*; a *Punch* if it was a Wednesday; or a *Bell's Life*, if it was Saturday. Nine out of ten of us would have asked his *vis-a-vis* if he objected to smoking. Ninety-nine out of a hundred would have received a permissory reply. Unless we were very good-tempered, we grumbled at the

train for going so slowly, and when we had finished our railway journey, wished to heaven that the fly would go as quick as the train; and we probably felt much the same satisfaction, and, unless we were bound to our own house, I must add the same feeling of uneasiness, that it is impossible quite to subdue on arriving at a great strange house, and on being ushered, with all the disorder of a railway journey upon one, into the bright company that is discussing afternoon tea in the drawing-room.

With this short paragraph I venture to ask the reader to be satisfied, and to imagine that after much such a journey as I have alluded to, Captain Lawless was shown into the presence of the fair company at Deymont.

Lord and Lady Deymont came forward at once to meet him. His lordship was a short, thickset, bald man, of some sixty years of age, with a slight tendency to corpulency, and a bright, good-humoured eye. Her lady-

ship, some fifteen years younger, had all the traces on her still of her beauty, in the days, twenty-five years ago now, when London ran mad for a season and a half, after the prettiest blonde that had ever been seen ; and thought Lord Deymont the happiest of the happy, when Lady Clementina Devereux consented to take his name.

On a settee, in a corner of the room, Captain Lawless' hasty glance could just distinguish Guy Deymont and his cousin, Lady Clementina. They seemed, at any rate, in no haste to rise to welcome the intruder, even if they were aware of his entrance.

His eye wandered hastily from them, though, and lingered on another sofa, where Lord Sturdith was bending in close conversation over the matchless figure of Marion Deymont. She had just raised her eyes, with a glance of pleasure, to meet his. Perhaps it was vanity—surely if so, it was excusable—that had permitted her pretty foot to peep

forth from beneath the folds of the rich brown silk she was wearing.

There were three other persons in the room—Sir Anthony Tyler, a rich, not very prepossessing baronet, verging on sixty, but an M.P. for his county, and a good Conservative; his wife, Lady Tyler;—charity perhaps might have hoped that she had once had a waist;—and their daughter, Constance Tyler. Two negatives make an affirmative I know that it is a bad one,—but it is the only tolerable reason that I can produce for two such ugly old people having so handsome a daughter. Dark, tall, jet-black hair in great luxuriance, jet-black eyes, good features, faultless teeth, perpetually visible, a graceful figure;—yet all this rich beauty spoilt from a want of expression, or rather from the insipid expression that was perpetually recurring in her silly smile.

Captain Lawless was intimately acquainted with everyone in the room. In regard to the three young ladies,—and this story more im-

mediately concerns them—he was in a somewhat peculiar position, which, to understand the events that ensued, it is, I think, absolutely necessary to mention.

Sundry innuendoes, to use no stronger term, had long apprised both Lawless and Lady Clementina of her parent's wishes. They therefore were neither of them ignorant of the relation which it was hoped that they would assume towards each other. For Miss Tyler Lawless had shown a somewhat unusual predilection; attracted by her pretty face he had, at the commencement of the season, flirted outrageously with her, and she, flattered, no doubt, by imagining that she had conquered the most handsome, the most popular, and almost the most eligible man in London, had been foolish enough to let her liking warm into something more—to fall desperately in love with her admirer. Lawless soon wearied of the empty beauty, grew heartily sick of her

silly speeches, thought no more of the girl, the happiness of whose life he had, perhaps, been the means of destroying, than he would have of a pretty hack—or, for a more apposite comparison, of a pretty picture.

Perhaps there was another reason too for his disregard of Miss Tyler; ever since he had first seen Marion Deymont, some months ago now, Lawless had been a changed man. He had abandoned his old pursuits, his promiscuous amours, his innumerable flirtations, the fastest of his acquaintance; given up his drag, and taken to riding—Miss Deymont rode—extemporised a passion for music—Miss Deymont was fond of the opera. Nay, he had actually gone to an Oratorio at Exeter Hall, and a flower show at the Botanical, and become a regular attendant at church—her church. Such is the power of love.

It was not much use, though; nine times out of ten Sturdith was leaning over her at the opera; riding by her in the park. Some-

how or other he seemed always to be at the Botanical,—always in Exeter Hall when she was. He had another advantage too, at church,—she sat in Lord Deymont's pew.

Such was the company which Lawless had been invited to meet.

They came forward, one and all, to welcome him.

"I am afraid you have had a cold journey, Lawless," began Lord Deymont.

"Well, indeed, it was; it requires no little courage to tempt one to leave home such weather as this; and no chance of any hunting, Sturdith."

"The hounds haven't been out for a week," said Lord Sturdith, "but we can give you something to do, Lawless. It's a splendid year for woodcocks."

"Just like you men," broke in her ladyship, "we ask you down to a ball, and you pretend to be so happy to come, and after all it turns out that you would much rather have

stayed in town if it had not been for the hunting."

"I don't plead guilty at all, Lady Deymont; you will see me dance furiously to-night. I always shoot straight after dancing hard."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Lord Sturdith, "we shan't let you rest then all night long, for we want straight powder to-morrow in Hilton Copse."

"You don't mean to say that you are going to shoot that to-morrow! why I am amply repaid for having been frozen alive on that miserable railway."

"There you go, again," said Lady Deymont, "shooting, shooting, nothing but shooting,—heigho! What a pity it is that women were ever made; the world would have got on so much better if there had been nothing but men and horses, dogs and pheasants, and, let me see, a fox now and then!"

"I shan't hold out any longer, Lady Deymont. I will prove you are wrong, though,

—if at least Miss Deymont will give me the pleasure of the first waltz?”

It was just perceptible, the cloud that flitted over Lady Deymont's brow. It was just audible, the whisper that Sturdith breathed into Miss Deymont's ear. She coloured up for a moment, and then answered, with a smile,

“I am so flattered with Lady Deymont's account of your object in coming here, that I shall decline the honour, with thanks,” and the proud beauty turned on her heel and walked with Lord Sturdith to the other end of the room.

There was an awkward silence for about a minute, and then Lawless asked,

“This ball at Hicklebury is for a charity, isn't it?”

“Yes, the Amalgamated Cripples,” answered Lord Deymont.

“It's very good of you to go so far; it must be a long way from here?”

“It's close on twelve miles, but we can

pack six into the omnibus—have you seen my new omnibus?—and the rest of us can go in the carriage. We shall have to start early, though. Soon after nine.”

“We dine at half-past six, Captain Lawless,” added Lady Deymont, “I hope that you can get up an appetite by then.”

“The ladies,” said Lord Deymont, “will not dress before dinner. They say they must have time for the finishing touches afterwards—”

“But you needn’t dress,” said her ladyship, “either, unless you wish to before dinner.”

“Marion, *we* really ought to go to dress,” said Lady Clementina; “it is getting on to six.”

Miss Deymont was too much occupied to hear at first; but Lord Sturdith handed her a candle. Lawless just caught her last words, as she took the candle from Lord Sturdith,—“Well, as *you* wish it, I won’t wear the wreath, but the white rose instead.”

CHAPTER IV.

"I SAY, Lawless," said Lord Sturdith, as he closed the door on the ladies, "I am afraid we have not put you up very well; but we expect Devereux and the Ellisons early next week, so we have had to stow you away in a rather uncouth manner."

"So as you give me a bed to sleep in, and a bath in the morning, I don't much care where I am. I have no doubt that I shall do well enough."

"It's only fair to tell you the truth," said Lord Deymont; "we've put you into the haunted room; but the ghost hasn't appeared

for years. If you like, though, I can give you another room; but it would be a very small one."

"Don't think of it, for a moment. Nothing I should like better than to see a ghost, particularly if it was a pretty woman."

"Well, then," said Lord Deymont, "I think you'd better show Lawless his room, Sturdith; he won't have too much time to make himself comfortable after his journey."

The haunted room was in the very oldest part of the house. A long passage separated it from the reception-room; indeed, there was no room of any sort near the haunted chamber. Perhaps it had obtained its name from its being so sequestered, for you would have hardly thought that the room which Lawless was shewn into deserved such a reputation.

A cheerful coal fire, sparkling in the grate, lit it up with a comfortable glare. A large four-poster was at the other end of the room—a

very comfortable sofa at the foot of the bed. An inviting arm chair on the proper left of the fire-place, and a writing desk in the middle of the room. A large wardrobe, a dressing table, and all the other necessities of a bed-chamber, all of the darkest mahogany ; and a book-case, stocked with some old unread volumes, helped to fill up the large room. There was one other peculiarity in the room, which was not quite so comfortable,—I mean that it had two windows opposite each other. The fact was, “ the haunted room ” filled up the whole of one storey of the turret on the west of the house, and so the builder had, regardless of draughts, thrown out a window to the north, and another to the south.

Lord Sturdith waited to see that Lawless had everything that he could want, and then left him to himself.

His servant had already unpacked his things for him, he was in no great hurry to dress ; and as he dawdled about, taking off his

coat, and putting on his dressing gown, his eye wandered round his new apartment.

There were two pictures in the room, large-sized oil paintings—family portraits, apparently of a remote date—portraits of a young man and a girl.

The high ruff which the lady wore—the pointed beard which the gentleman had, apparently, been just old enough to grow, fixed a date for the pictures at once—the earlier part of the seventeenth century.

There was a peculiarly sad and frightened expression about the girl's face—a face that must, in life, have been conspicuously handsome, and the representation of which would have been pleasing, had it not been for the scared uneasy look which the painter had somehow managed to associate with it. But it was the other portrait that attracted Lawless most—an admirably-painted picture. Never was a face portrayed more radiant

with every happiness, every hope and aspiration of youth.

But, as he gazed upon it, more and more it flashed upon him the likeness which that portrait bore to his cousin, Lord Sturdith. Despite the difference of countenance and the pointed beard, there was the same shaped head, the same high forehead, the same eyes, the same features, and the same expression—yes, the same expression as that which he had noticed on Lord Sturdith's face that evening, when he had handed Marion Deymont her candle.

It grew on him, more and more, as he looked at it; and yet there was not, probably, anything so very remarkable in the likeness, for the picture was, no doubt, a portrait of one of Lord Deymont's ancestors.

When Lawless reached the drawing-room, he found that the whole party had assembled there before him. They occupied much the

same positions as they had on their arrival—that is to say, Lord Sturdith and Miss Deymont, Lady Clementina and Guy sat apart, as they had before. There was no help for it,—Lawless had to tackle his old flame, Miss Tyler.

But he had not to wait long, for dinner was announced almost immediately; and, as Lord Deymont led off Lady Tyler to the dining-room, and Sturdith, possibly dreading some contrary orders, hastily followed with Miss Deymont, Lady Deymont, with her sweetest smile, turned on Lawless, and said, “Captain Lawless, will you take Lady Clementina,—Guy, will you take Miss Tyler, please?”

Oh, Lady Deymont, Lady Deymont, how happy you were, in having an opportunity, as you thought, of putting a stop to that flirtation. It was so bold a stroke of yours, that I almost pity you for your failure. Yet it failed, and in this wise,—

Lord Deymont had placed Lady Tyler on his right, and Lord Sturdith had sat down with Miss Deymont on the left of Lady Deymont's chair. Guy had just handed Miss Tyler into a chair on Lord Deymont's left, so that when Lawless and Lady Clementina came into the room, there were four vacant places,—Lady Deymont's, at the bottom of the table—a place reserved, of course, for Sir Anthony, on her right—a place between Lady Tyler and Marion Deymont on one side, and a place between Guy Deymont and Sir Anthony on the other side of the table.

Can you doubt what happened? Lady Clementina was quite as anxious to sit next Guy, as Lawless was to sit next Miss Deymont, so she made no objection to Lawless', "I am afraid we must separate, Lady Clementina." So that when Lady Deymont came into the room, she had the satisfaction of seeing everything just as she had *not* wished it to be.

There was no help for it, though. She could hardly have made everyone change their places, so had to be content with saying, "I am sorry you have had to separate, Captain Lawless," and then grin and bear it.

Guy Deymont took no notice of Lady Clementina till after grace. He was quite safe, then, so he abruptly ended his conversation with Miss Tyler, and turned to Lady Clementina. I am afraid Miss Tyler could not have found her dinner a very amusing one, for not another word did he address to her during the whole evening.

On the other side of the table Lawless was just a little more successful, for he managed to gain Miss Deymont's ear for a few seconds, while he lamented the long time that had elapsed since he had seen her ; but it was only for a few seconds, for Sturdith turned round to her, "You never got your ride, after all, then, Marion. How did you amuse yourself while we were out shooting?"

"Oh, Clementina and I occupied ourselves with making bouquets for this evening. I made Clementina keep a bud for you; did you see it? We sent it up to your bedroom."

"Yes, thanks, and guessed whom I owed it to; I shall only wear it on one condition, though."

"And that is—?"

"That you dance the first waltz with me, and all the others I ask you for, unless," and he bent over her so that Lawless could hardly catch the words, "you prefer sitting them out."

There was a happy flush came over Marion Deymont's face, but she only said, "you know how fond I am of dancing, Sturdith; it is not likely that I should refuse any one, is it?"

"Then, Miss Deymont," broke in Lawless, "I hope—"

"Was there any news in London, Captain

Lawless?" asked old Sir Anthony, who had not observed that Lawless was speaking. "Was there any news in London?" repeated the Baronet, as he got nothing but a frown at first in answer to his question.

"In London—no. Why, there's no one in London. I have not seen a carriage for a month, and I have had the whole of White's to myself for the last six weeks."

"I hope that you did not find your room very dreadfully gloomy," asked Lady Deymont, with her sweetest smile.

"On the contrary; it was as comfortable as possible."

"I insisted upon their telling you first. I thought that it was only right to do so."

"Thank you, very much, but I am afraid that I am one of those uninteresting, incredulous individuals, who don't believe in the existence—that's not quite the right word, though—of ghosts at all. Don't you remem-

ber what Coleridge says about the ghost of Samuel? I believe he's right—and, if so, the only really authentic ghost vanishes."

"Is Captain Lawless really in a haunted room, Lord Deymont?" asked Miss Tyler.

"Yes; I don't think that he is the sort of person that ghosts will trouble. I say, Lawless, it is a lady haunts the room, you know. She's very pretty, so if you do see her, don't fall in love with her."

There was a laugh round the table, but Miss Tyler only turned pale.

"I'm glad it's a she," said Lawless. "Nothing like a pretty face, even if it isn't substantial enough to kiss. By-the-bye, though, I said that I didn't believe in ghosts, but I do in tricks; so bar tricks all of you, for upon my honour, I will fire a pistol at the ghost, whoever it is."

"What is the story of the ghost, Lord Deymont?" asked Lady Tyler.

"Oh, it's an old family tradition. A cen-

tury and a half old ; but it hasn't been seen for I don't know how long."

"What, have you got a ghost?" said Sir Anthony, from the other end of the table. "I shall have a greater respect for Deymont than ever."

"Well, we have a ghost; at least, people say that one of the rooms is haunted by a lady."

"And who was, or is she?"

"Oh, poor thing—whether she walks or no—her story is well known. It is a sad story, too; I don't wonder at its giving rise to a ghost story."

Miss Tyler bent nearer to his lordship; somehow or other, every one, even Guy and Lady Clementina, and Sturdith and Miss Deymont, had stopped speaking; all were waiting to hear the story.

"Whoever heard of a ghost story before going to a ball," laughed Lord Deymont; "besides it is two hundred years old now,

and we shall frighten Lawless out of his wits."

"Oh! do please tell it me," begged Miss Tyler.

"Well then, it's above two hundred years ago now, since the heir of the Deymonts was murdered."

"Murdered!" said Lady Tyler, with a start.

"Yes, he was an only son—that Lord Sturdith—about the same age as Sturdith is now! he was murdered in Hilton Wood."

"Ah," said Sir Anthony, "that's the wood you are going to shoot to-morrow, isn't it?"

"Yes; I will show you the very spot where the murder was."

"But I thought you said that the ghost was a lady?" said Miss Deymont, in a trembling voice.

"So I did; but you go too fast. This young Sturdith was in love, and the woman he loved is said to haunt this house."

“But what was he murdered for?”

“That is the worst of it all; it so happened that his Cousin Deymont, of Sturdith, loved the same woman. Whether it was accidentally or not, I do not know, but he met her walking with Sturdith one winter morning early, in Hilton Wood. I fancy there were high words passed between the cousins at first, and that words led to blows; but at any rate, Lord Sturdith was killed in the struggle.”

“And the murderer?”

“Oh they were lawless times, those. Prince Rupert wanted dragoons, and there was no bolder spirit in all his troops than poor Sturdith’s murderer. He was killed at Marston Moor.”

“Too good a death for such a wretch,” said Lady Tyler.

“Yes, and so,” added Lord Deymont, with a smile, “thinks the poor ghost. Poor girl; in her life she never recovered that awful

day. She seems to have turned into a helpless imbecile. Poor Lord Deymont let her live here, and she used to steal out at all hours to the grave where her lover had been laid, and sit for hours together upon it, chanting some wild incoherent ditty, or tending the flowers which she had planted upon it."

"Did she live long?"

"No; not very long, and then they said that her ghost used to appear; there is an old superstition in the family that it is uneasy because the murder was unavenged at the time. It is to be laid some day, for the murder is to be avenged at last, but how that is to be, Heaven only knows; it is almost as incredible as the ghost itself."

"But it hasn't appeared then lately?"

"Lately—no; not for years and years. There was an absurd story a long time ago of its having appeared; but that is the only time I ever heard it talked of even; and, let

me see," he leaned over towards his wife, "that was soon after we were married, wasn't it, Clementina. Yes, it must have been about twenty years ago, for I remember that it was about the time that Sturdith was born—but I declare you are none of you taking care of yourselves. Sir Anthony, a glass of wine—hand the wine to Sir Anthony. Lawless won't you join us. Here's to pleasant slumbers, and no ghosts."

"How long is it since the murder took place?" asked Sir Anthony, after a pause.

"Two hundred and odd years now. It was 1645 or '46, I think. You will find the whole story told in Heavitome's history of the county; we have pictures of the young lord and his lady-love."

"I should rather like to see them."

"Then you must make friends with Lawless, for they are hung in the haunted room."

"Oh, then," said Lawless, "that accounts

for the peculiar expression on the girl's face. It looks almost like the picture of a mad woman."

"You noticed that, then. Why I believe you are already working yourself up to believe in ghosts. It is not a bad beginning—that notion about the picture—but it's quite true. She has that expression. The picture was painted after the murder."

"Well, for my part," interrupted Lady Deymont, from the other end of the table, "I think that we have had enough of murders and ghosts. Won't you have some more jelly, Lady Tyler; I dare say we shan't get much of a supper at Hicklebury. By-the-bye, how shall we pack?"

"Oh, I think," was his lordship's answer, "that Sir Anthony and Lady Tyler had better come with us in the carriage, and let the six dancers take care of themselves in the omnibus. I'll wager they'll be happier than if we were with them."

CHAPTER V.

It took very nearly two hours—the drive to Hicklebury that evening. It is true that it is only twelve miles; but the roads were in a bad state, with just a coating of half-frozen snow upon them, so that it was as much as the horses, though they had been roughed, could do to get the carriages up the long hill that leads into the town.

But to at least four of the six people in the omnibus those two hours went but too quickly. How was it after they had been so much together that day, and had sat together at din-

ner, that Guy and Lady Clementina, that Sturdith and Miss Deymont, could have anything left to say to each other? Lawless had the reputation of being an agreeable man, yet Lawless soon exhausted the few things he had to say to Miss Tyler, and sat moodily and sleepily silent for the rest of the drive.

But they reached the Town Hall of Hicklebury at last, and in a few moments more were in the ball-room.

A long large room, beautifully lighted with two great chandeliers in the middle, and coronets of candles all round. In the very centre, a bay window, large enough for the band to sit in, a floor exquisitely slippery, without being greasy; such was the ball-room at Hicklebury. Opposite the band, a door led into a long narrow room, a flirting room, furnished with comfortable luxurious sofas, irresistible after a waltz; communicating with the supper-room, a splendid apartment, almost as large as the ball-room itself.

Just as they reached the room the band began to play "Kathleen Mavourneen," and in a moment more, Lawless saw Marion Deymont whizling round in Lord Sturdith's arms.

"Won't you dance, Captain Lawless?" said Lady Deymont.

It was good-naturedly meant, for Lady Clementina was already hard at it with Guy; there was no help for it, he must put up with that wearying beauty, Miss Tyler.

Yet she danced to perfection—danced perhaps better than either Lady Clementina or Miss Deymont, and there is something satisfactory—no, that's not a nearly strong enough word—in dancing with a pretty girl, who really can dance. Round and round in that mystic maze. Dancing faster than anyone else in the room, yet the only couple that never seemed to come to grief. Past some, round others,—Miss Tyler never seemed to tire. She had the arm she loved best to support her,—she could

have gone on dancing, so she thought, for ever.

Lawless could not help offering her some refreshment after such a dance as that. As he passed through the ante-room, he just noticed Miss Deymont and Sturdith on a sofa together. The next dance, a quadrille, had begun before he came back. They were still sitting on the same sofa.

He saw Miss Tyler safe back to Lady Tyler's side, and then returned into the ante-room. It was a rather bold measure to confront those two in their solitude; but then "faint heart, &c.," and so he went boldly up to Miss Deymont.

"I hope that I may have the pleasure of dancing the next dance with you, notwithstanding Lady Deymont's bad report of me."

"Let me see," as that pretty eye bent down for a moment, pretending to consult her card (there was not a single entry upon it). It rose again for a moment,—the eye, not the

card,—and rested on Sturdith. “The next dance is number five; why that’s a waltz, I’m engaged to you for that, am I not, Sturdith?”

It hardly needed Sturdith’s stammering answer,

“Of course you are, Marion,”

The twinkle in her eye was proof enough to convict her of hypocrisy. Lawless bit his lips with annoyance, but he schooled himself for the nonce, and only said,

“Then I hope that I may have number seven, the gallop?”

“Yes,” was the lazy drawling answer, “I’m not engaged for that,” uttered in a tone as if she wished to heaven she were.

“Sturdith, will you put Captain Lawless’ name down for me on my card?”

“Can I not do it, Miss Deymont?” broke in Lawless.

“Oh, no, thank you; I wouldn’t trouble you for the world. I have no doubt Sturdith will

do it for me," and again she raised her eyes and fixed them on Sturdith.

"To be sure I will, dear—I mean, of course I will, Marion," and Lawless noticed her tremble slightly, as her hand lingered for a moment in Sturdith's as she gave him her card.

"Won't you take me into the other room, Sturdith; I should so like an ice?"

It was all said naturally enough; and yet, as she sailed off on Sturdith's arm, and left Lawless standing there alone, he noticed a provoking twinkle in the eye that looked much more like, "I do so want to get away from Captain Lawless."

But Lawless was roused from his reverie by a hand being laid on his shoulder. He turned round as he caught the words,

"You here, Lawless, have you driven over from Sturdith?—oh, no, I suppose you are staying at Deymont."

The speaker was as great a contrast to

Lawless as could well be conceived ; and yet, the Earl of Penzance, for such was his name, was an officer in the same regiment, and of the same rank—a short stunted figure, a listless, inanimate blue eye, a lazy, self-satisfied drawl—were the three things which were perhaps the most notable in his lordship ; but Lawless gave the proffered hand a hearty squeeze.

“ Ah, Penzance, it does one good to see you. Isn't there a pretty face left in London, then, or have fires been forbidden in the club, that you have come down in all this miserable weather without a prospect of a hunting day for a fortnight, at least ? ”

His lordship smiled a stupid inexpressive smile, and exclaimed,

“ Why, the truth is, Peyton bullied me so much to come down to him, that it was almost more effort to refuse than to go ; so, in a fit of good nature, I came.”

The friend, whom Lord Penzance had

alluded to, and to whom he pointed as he mentioned his name, was standing, a few yards off, talking to the partner whom he had just deposited on a sofa. He was a tall, dark, handsome man, in the same regiment as Lawless, and almost as great a favourite as Lawless himself.

“And there being a ball, your natural predilection for the weaker sex, made you persuade him to bring you to it?”

“Exactly; but there is one difficulty; I hardly know any of these local flames. By-the-bye, be a good fellow for once. Introduce me to Miss Tyler.”

“To be sure I will; but don’t you know her?”

“No—that confounded illness of mine last season. What a charming thing she is.”

“*Chacun à son gout*,” was Lawless’ answer, as he led his lordship away to where Miss Tyler was sitting.

“Will you let me, Miss Tyler, introduce a

very particular friend of mine, who is dying for an acquaintance?" His voice sunk very low as he uttered the last words, in a half scornful air, "Lord Penzance,—Miss Tyler."

Lawless did not wait to see the faint flush that was on Miss Tyler's face, as he hurried away.

Number five was just beginning—the dance that he had asked for, and which had been refused. He stood at a corner of the room, near the door, watching each couple as they passed. He was in no humour to dance that dance.

And yet it was a few moments after the dance had begun before he saw them. They were not dancing, so he fancied, as the others did. They seemed to dance more quietly, more gracefully than the rest. Less for the sake of the dance, than of each other. They were the only persons who conversed while they danced, for, as they floated round, Lawless could see him bending over her—could

watch—not hear—him whispering into her ears. Could see her face constantly raised—could see the gleam of joy that was ever beaming in her eyes.

And how pretty she looked that evening, with the one white rose in her hair, and a gold locket, hung with a plain black velvet ribbon, round her delicate, well-shaped neck. She danced to perfection. Her dancing was so natural, so graceful; and I doubt if her tall, classical figure, ever showed to greater advantage, than while she was waltzing. I doubt whether she ever waltzed so gracefully as when she danced with Lord Sturdith.

Lawless' eyes never left her. I believe he thought that the band was only playing for that one couple, and that there was no one dancing but them; and so he followed them through all the dance. How long it seemed!

But it ended at last; and he watched them again into the ante-room—watched them take their old places on the sofa.

There is an end to everything in this world, and even a square dance forms no exception to the rule.

The next dance passed slowly enough; but it was *his* dance, number seven. She was sitting on the sofa, whither he had watched her, talking to Sturdith. What was it that he was saying at that moment? Why was it that she was bending her eyes down? Why was it that her foot—you could just see it peeping out from under her dress—was working so nervously? Why was it that her colour came and left her, variable as an April sky? Why was it that her fingers kept so restlessly fidgetting with her fan?

Perhaps at such a moment, under such circumstances, nine men out of ten would have retired, without claiming their dance; if so, Lawless was the tenth, for he went up, with an air of rightful ownership, “I think that *I* am to have the pleasure of this dance, Miss Deymont?”

She looked up, and in a bewildered manner began,

“Your dance—oh—ye—es; but, that is to say, I am afraid that I have lost my card. What can I have done with it?”

“Indeed! how unfortunate,” answered Lawless, regardless of her concluding question; “but I put your name down on my card.”

“Did you? ah, yes, I see; this is number seven, then?”

“I hope so; for it came, so I fancied, six dances too late.”

“It’s very good of you to say so; but will you let me off this once? I am so tired, I really don’t think that I *could* dance.”

“If you wish—”

“No, no, not that; but the room feels so hot. I really must rest. I am very sorry. Stay, there is Lady Deymont; I will ask her to get you another partner instead.”

“Oh, don’t trouble yourself, I beg of you;

but if you are tired, may I hope that, when you are rested, I may have one dance with you. Shall I say number ten?"

"You see I have lost my card—"

"Can I get you another?"

"Thank you; but that would hardly do. I don't know to whom I may not be already engaged; besides, I am *so* tired. I really cannot promise now." She added something to Sturdith in a low voice, and Lawless, as he turned away, heard, plainly enough, her low and cheery laugh. He fancied that it was at his discomfiture.

But it was in no good humour that he turned away. He was biting his lips, and the blood had run up to his head, and had swollen the big veins that were starting from his forehead. He had taken off one of his gloves, and was plucking angrily at the white kid, as if he wished to tear the long tapering fingers from the hand.

Just as he reached the other end of the

room, he overheard—he could not help it—a conversation between Mr. Peyton and Lord Penzance.

“Well,” the former was saying; “I tell you what it is, Penzance; I’ll bet you what you like he marries her.”

“Pooh! he’ll do better than that,” replied the other; “besides, I doubt whether she would have him.”

“What, not have a coronet; a penniless girl like that!”

“Oh, if that’s all, Peyton, Lawless is as great a catch as Sturdith, you know; and how she used to flirt with him last season.”

“*Nous avons changé tout cela*—look there!”

“Well, it does look a case, doesn’t it; but the girl’s a flirt; it will come to nothing. I bet you they’ll never marry.”

“I’ll bet you an even century they do. I’ll pay the day either of them marries anyone else.”

Lord Penzance hesitated a moment. He

was too cautious to stake his money without due reflection, and, when he answered, he spoke the thoughts that had passed through him.

“Well, I will take your bet; for they may die, or they may quarrel, or anything else may happen. So an even hundred that Sturdith does not marry Guy Deymont’s sister.”

“That’s a hundred pounds in my pocket. I wouldn’t take fifty pounds down, to let you off the bet altogether.”

CHAPTER VI.

Just at that moment, on a settee, near the door of the ball-room, Guy Deymont was sitting talking to Lady Clementina. They had danced much together that evening; and now, after a capital galop—the galop Lawless had asked of Miss Deymont—they had sat down to rest—that, I believe, is the proper expression for the little tête-à-tête so pleasant with *the* partner of the evening.

“I am afraid mamma isn’t happy,” Lady Clementina was saying; “she was so checkmated at dinner; and I am sure that she

can't bear Sturdith flirting so with Marion—at least, not in public; and—”

“And what?—you have run through a long enough category of grievances for one evening.”

“Oh, they are nothing compared to the last; here she has got Captain Lawless to come all the way from London, and I positively have not danced with him once.”

She shook her head in a merry mood, and her eyes danced with pleasure on seeing the little tremour of jealousy that her speech had produced, as Guy answered,

“Well but, Clementina, you could not dance with him if he wouldn't ask you; so it's not your fault or mine either.”

“Yours, Guy!” and again there was that merry laugh, but she grew graver. “I do believe, though, there will be no fault at all soon. Talk of the black gentleman—! *mais voici*, and how dreadfully glum he looks.”

“If you have to dance with him now, I

don't envy you," Guy answered, almost in a whisper, for Lawless came up just at that moment. "I have been looking for you everywhere, Lady Clementina, to beg, if I may, at least these lancers."

There was a contemptuous smile on his lips, and a contemptuous glance at Guy, as he jerked out the apologetical parenthesis at the end of the sentence, but Lady Clementina was much more facile than her cousin Marion, though she sighed, perhaps at her own departure from truth, when she answered, rising,

"I shall be very happy, Captain Lawless." She hesitated a moment, and then added, turning to Guy, "won't you get a partner and be our *vis-a-vis*, Guy? at least, unless Captain Lawless has already engaged one."

"On the contrary, I was going to ask you whom you would like for a *vis-a-vis*."

Again that quiet accusing smile as he led her off.

They were silent for a full minute, and then Lawless began in a quiet, firm voice, "the ball seems a great success."

"Yes, no wonder charities have recourse to balls. The Amalgamated Cripples always make a good thing of Hicklebury."

"I did not quite mean that," answered Lawless, after a pause, "I am afraid that I was not thinking of the charity but of the company."

"Ah, they do seem to be enjoying themselves, and the band is very good, isn't it?"

"Excellent." Lawless forced himself to smile, as he added, "I have been amusing myself by watching Sturdith. I shall chaff him famously to-morrow. I had not even heard that he had been smitten by Miss Deymont."

It was a poor pretence at a smile after all, but perhaps Lady Clementina did not observe its shortcomings, for she answered,

"Then is that why you have been doing

your duty so badly to-night? I have hardly seen you dancing at all."

"I suppose that I am getting old and stale; your brother will soon reach the same state. Nothing like love to thrust a man prematurely upon the shelf."

"Then you plead guilty?"

"No, no, not I. I was only predicting the consequence to Sturdith, and you will see that I shall be right."

"I hope not quite; but Marion is so nice. We all like her so much."

"Then—"

"Why you ought to be dancing, Captain Lawless, instead of standing talking to me."

There was a pause of a few minutes till the figure was over, and then Lawless went on,

"Certainly Miss Deymont is looking her best to-night."

"So she—I mean I have no doubt that she is as happy as she looks."

There was a frown on Lawless' face, as he answered,

"You don't mean, then—"

"Why, were not you told?" broke in Lady Clementina.

"Told! Told what?"

"Why, surely some one must have told you; or I suppose that we must have all talked it over so much that we fancied that you knew as much as ourselves that Sturdith proposed to Marion yesterday."

"And she—"

"Accepted him, of course. You can hardly doubt that after what you have seen this evening; but it isn't the visiting figure, Captain Lawless,—it's the chain. What are you doing?"

And she might well ask, for Lawless was sailing away in some imaginary figure in a manner that would have horrified any well constituted ball-room. Lady Clementina

succeeded in pulling him up at last, but he was silent through the rest of the dance, and handed her in silence back again to the seat, where he had first found her.

She had not been sitting there many minutes before Guy Deymont rejoined her.

“You have got over your duty dance then,—I hope you enjoyed it.”

“Do you, really? I have a great mind to say that I did, to tease you;” and Lady Clementina looked up with a wicked smile.

“He seemed a cheerful partner, certainly.”

“Yes,” said her ladyship, pretending to take the sneer in earnest, “and I have no doubt he found me so, for I told him a whole heap of family news. Only fancy, he had not even heard of Sturdith and Marion.”

“And it was your telling him about them that made him look so glum, I suppose; but what a charming galop,—positively you must let me have it.”

"No, Guy, I really can't. Why you have had four dances already with me; I don't know what mamma won't say."

"Why, that we had five, to be sure. What can be the harm? it would be different, you know, if we weren't cousins."

"Sturdith and Marion are cousins, Guy."

He looked grave for one moment,—perhaps more than one thought passed through his brain, more than one word rose upon his lips just then, but he only said,

"Well, there is no harm in that, I'm quite sure," and, putting his arm round her waist, started on his fifth dance.

And how they both enjoyed that galop,—they hardly gave themselves time to recover their breath after some short pause which they had been constrained by sheer exhaustion to make before they started off again in their mazy whirl. They never ended till the band abruptly ceased, and Guy began,

"I am sure you must have an ice, or some-

thing, after such a gallop as that. Do come into the supper-room."

She put her arm in his and let him lead her through the room which I have already described. It was emptier than it had been all that evening; even Sturdith and Marion had left the seats which they had so constantly occupied. At first they thought no one was there, but another glance showed them that they were mistaken,—there was another man in the room.

He was standing, with his back towards them, near the fire-place at the other end of the room. His elbow rested on the mantel-piece, his head on his hand,—his other hand was clenched, clenched so tightly that the glove had split right across the back, and the big veins were plainly visible.

It hardly needed the looking-glass above the mantel-piece reflecting his features to tell them whose figure that was. In very few ball-rooms, even in England, can you find two

such men as Lawless,—but they did look at the reflection in the glass, and a glance at it made them pause in their passage to the supper-room.

And they might well stop, for there was something fearful in Lawless' expression at that moment; it might have been anger or disappointment, or it might have been bodily pain that had forced the big drops of perspiration from his forehead that were chasing each other down his face,—it might have been pain, too, that had caused his veins to swell, and the blood to rush into his head, colouring his hard, bronzed cheeks like a modest girl's,—perhaps it was; Guy thought so apparently, for he went up, and laid his hand kindly on the other's shoulder.

“Are you ill, Lawless? Can I do anything for you?”

Lawless turned with a great start, and his face grew as pale as it had been red before.

“Thank ye, Deymont, no. I shall be better

soon, but I was tired, very tired. Perhaps it was my journey," he added, with a smile.

"Would you not like to go home; or at any rate to lie down?"

It was good-naturedly intended—but, to say the least, it was injudicious. The last thing that a man likes, when he is out of heart or temper in a neighbour's intrusion. Lawless' thoughts at the moment were far away from the Hicklebury ball; Guy's chance question re-called them to it, and re-called Lawless to the knowledge that his weakness had been discovered.

The silent tears of a strong man, it has been truly said, are a far more pitiful sight than the loud outwailings of a weak one. For the grief must be great, indeed, that can force a tear from the strong man's eye. And Lawless' grief was no slight flesh-wound. A year's dream of a life-long happiness had vanished from him in a moment. You may laugh and call it nothing. You may think

it requires only time and change to blot out the recollection of a hopeless love. I believe that the man who has loved and lost can never be the same man again.

"Oh, no ! thank you. I will go and dance instead, but I have been so little at balls lately. Don't be frightened ; I really am quite well again," and he turned and walked away.

Guy shook his head. "What can be the matter with Lawless ? he looks as if something had put him out terribly."

"Can't you guess, Guy ?" was Lady Clementina's answer.

"I—no. How should I be able to ?"

"Did you never notice him when he was with Marion ? I used to last year in London, but I did not think much of it ; had almost forgot all about it till he spoke to me about her this evening."

"Spoke to you about her ?"

"Yes ; he did not know—none of you it

seems had told him that she was engaged to Sturdith. I thought that he must have heard it from some one, but it seems that he had not; he became very silent when I told him."

"I always thought—at least I am sure Lord Deymont always hoped he would marry some one else."

Perhaps Lady Clementina knew how to interpret that timid searching look; could guess why Guy had always thought, is not feared the truer word? that Lawless would marry some one else, but she only shook her pretty face and answered, smiling,

"Oh! I found that out long, long ago. I am afraid that mamma never has. Then you see, she wasn't in my position, seeing Marion elevated into the *prima donna*. I believe that to this day she thinks that I am that."

"But, Clementina," and Guy looked graver, "now that his *prima donna* is translated, or whatever term you like to give to

her apotheosis, perhaps he really will do what your mother wants."

She smiled mischievously, but still she sighed before she answered. "Perhaps he will. It won't be for want of an opportunity. Mamma takes care that he should have plenty of that."

"I suppose that it would be a very good marriage," said Guy, trying to look cheerful. "Sturdith is a beautiful place, and it is very provoking that it has gone out of the family."

She was trembling as she answered, and playing with her fan, "yes; but we have been so long alone, Guy. Take me back, please. No—no, not there. Don't you see Captain Lawless is there; I don't want to go near him."

CHAPTER VII.

THE night—the long wintry night—had run into the small hours of the morning before the carriage and the omnibus stopped at the gates of Deymont Park, to wait for the old keeper's wife to be roused from her sleep—to wait till she had sufficiently roused herself to find the key to let them in with.

But when they had rolled up the long drive through the park, and had reached the house itself, they had not to wait, for the old butler was ready for them, and there was some good hot soup, smoking and tempting, to warm them before they went to bed.

Somehow or other, they managed to sit over that supper longer than one would have thought that people would have chosen to have sat at that late, or rather early hour; but they did sit there, and talked merrily enough. Some of them at least were in no hurry to retire to their bedrooms.

But Lady Deymont suggested bed at last, and Lady Tyler assented willingly, for chaperones will tire, if girls do not. So the merry party was doomed to break up.

What was Sturdith saying to Marion, as he wished her good night? He was promising to show her Hilton Wood, if she'd only be down early enough, before breakfast next morning. I suppose that old ghost-story at dinner had aroused her curiosity. So they parted for the night with something to look forward to.

"We shan't breakfast till eleven. None of us I think will be ready before that," was

Lady Deymont's parting speech, "but I hope no one will come down till they choose."

"No," said Lord Deymont, "breakfast will go on till one. We shall call it lunch, after then; but those who mean to come out shooting ought to start soon after twelve. Good night."

Those six young people—what were they all doing one half hour later?

Marion Deymont had hurried to bed. Not so quickly indeed, as not to cast first a contented satisfied look at her glass, and not before she had taken a miniature from a drawer, and looked at it fondly. She had hurried to bed, for she had promised to be down early the next morning; and she was sleeping, and smiling in her sleep, for she was dreaming of her joy.

And he she was dreaming of? He had placed a lock of hair under his pillow—a lock of her own bright auburn hair—and in his

sleep he still grasped it lovingly; remembered, even in his sleep, from whose head it had been shorn.

Two others of those six young people were in bed; but unlike Sturdith and Marion, they were awake.

Awake, for they had not the fond assurance—they could only guess that their love was returned. Awake—for through Lady Clementina's brain there came whirling a thought of what her parents would say when they learned that she preferred her poor penniless cousin to their choice. Awake—for Guy was musing how long it would be before he could earn money enough to justify him in proposing to his uncle's daughter.

Miss Tyler was not in bed. Nay, she had only just removed the wreath from her hair, and was looking at it, just as people do look intently when they are busy thinking. There was something very like a tear slowly running down her cheek. There was some-

thing very like a pout—a pout of vexation and disappointment—on her ripe cherry lips.

The last of those six, Lawless had placed his hand candlestick on the writing table, in the middle of his room—the haunted room. Its little flame was not enough to illumine one quarter of that large apartment, and the fire, too, had well nigh burned itself out. It added but little light. The room was wrapt in—what, had it not been for Milton—I would have ventured to have called but ‘darkness visible.’

Lawless had taken off his dress-coat, and had put on a loose warm dressing-gown, and was sitting in a quaint, straight, old-fashioned arm chair, before the fast dying fire. Have you ever noticed how a man’s hair, after heavy work or anxious thought, grows rough and untidy? Just so, Lawless’ hair, usually so smooth, was bristly and shaggy, if I may use the expression, for there were many cares came whirling through his brain that evening, and

the thought of them well nigh drove him mad.

Why do I linger so over the recollections of that evening? All these pages written, and not twelve hours past! Yet it is sweet to linger on while the seconds of that night are fleeting so quickly by. Pleasant to linger on where they are sleeping so happily—ignorant that the day is breaking which is to throw so dark a cloud over all this sunshine.

Yes; the day is breaking fast. In the distant east, the cold grey light of early winter morning is resting on the bared boughs of the old trees, and rousing creation to the life of day. How fast and how silently that cold grey creeps on! How streaks of white, one over another, line the eastern sky! And how, at last, old Phœbus Apollo—a pale, cold image of his former self,—rises from his couch, while the thin crust of snow looks whiter and colder than ever in the first morning glow.

Not a living soul—nay, not a sign of a living soul—in all the lordly pleasure ground that stretches southward from Deymont House. In the long, irregular pile of red brick, you cannot notice yet an open window, or mark the faintest curl of smoke. It is a late morning, that, at Deymont House, for breakfast is not till eleven; then why should servants get up at six?

What is that which the old clock in the stable-yard is striking now? five, six, seven, eight—eight o'clock, and no one down yet. Here is an enchanted house, indeed. Was there ever a fairy bower so still as this?

Half-an-hour more—half-an-hour more, at least, before the spell was broken. Half-past eight, and a lock creaked, a chain rattled, and a side door opened. Some sign of life at last.

Into that fresh cold morning air, first of that sluggard household, with a smile on his handsome face, stepped the young Lord Sturdith.

And he might well wear that smile, for, despite all the fatigues of the evening before, Marion had redeemed her promise,—Marion was up too, and with him.

They walked lightly along the hard gravel walk, Sturdith first closing the door of the house behind him. They walked lightly but slowly along. She was hanging upon his arm, and he was bending over her; and yet, no need of whispering, Sturdith, for there is no one to listen to the words you are breathing, or to catch the gems of love that are dropping from her lips.

They are discussing the day's promise, last night's ball, the frost, slight commonplace subjects—subjects which one would broach to a casual acquaintance; and yet with them they have a peculiar charm, for it is love that is speaking, and love that is listening.

And she is hanging on his arm, and he is bending over her, and so they go down that

broad terrace walk, for at the bottom of it there is a lattice leading to Hilton Wood. Yet why leave that broad walk, Sturdith? All the hallowed ancestry of six long centuries are looking down upon you. That ancestry!—it is no light gossip—no curious eavesdropper; then why leave those holy precincts? What cruel fate was it that tempted you to Hilton Wood that morning?

Just as they reached the end of the long walk, the gardener, who had lived at Deymont since Lord Sturdith was a mere child—the old gardener, who had romped with the children, showed them how to weed their little gardens, told them what seeds to sow, what herbs to plant—old honest Digweed, the privileged servant—nay, friend of the family, met them. He was coming from Hilton Wood, and his old bronzed face lighted up as he saw them, and touched his cap.

“Good morning, my lord; I did not expect

to see any of you up so early this morning. My old woman told me that it was late before ye were at home; but he always was an early riser, my lady,—I mean, miss; but then you are to be my lady soon, you know,” and here he touched his hat again, and Marion coloured; but the old man went on, “I always told my old woman, miss, that the young lord would turn out well, ever since he climbed that tree yonder—that large elm, miss—do you mind it, my lord?—after the starling’s nest?—and he was but such a younker then, miss.”

“You mustn’t listen to what Digweed says about me, Marion,” said Sturdith; “he was always a flatterer;” and then turning to the gardener, he added, “I am going to show Miss Deymont Hilton Wood, Digweed. She wants to see the ghost’s seat.”

The ghost’s seat was a mossy bank, where the murder which I have alluded to had been committed.

"I've just come from Hilton Wood, my lord, myself, and I am glad that I have been there this morning, for I found that gipsy fellow poaching about, and turned him out; but he might have been rude to you had you met him."

Lord Sturdith smiled; but he only said, "I wish that fellow would leave off poaching, and take to some honest calling. He'd make a rare woodman; he's the finest fellow in these parts, Digweed."

"I wish he was out of these parts, my lord—he's up to no good with his thieving, poaching habits; but I've sent him about his business, my lord; he'll hardly come back to-day."

"If he does, and I meet him, I think that I shall offer him a keeper's place," Lord Sturdith gaily answered, as he led Marion away.

"Who is this gipsy, Sturdith?" she asked, as they walked on.

"Oh, don't you know about Jim, the gipsy?"

he's a poaching fellow, I'm afraid, and up to little or no good; but he's such a fine fellow, I can't help liking him. We had some sports, eighteen months ago, in the park, and this fellow, he licked all the country—jumping, running, wrestling—beat the best man at each. They were as jealous of him as possible. But the worst is, the fellow won't settle down to anything. My father had him up for poaching, and gave him a couple of months; but I think that it was a pity. He is such a fine fellow,—I always long to make a keeper of him."

"Digweed doesn't seem to have any great affection for him."

"Why, no; none of the people on the estate could bear to be beaten by gipsies; and when the fellow was put into gaol, he used some awkward language, threatened my father, or me, or somebody, and you know how they all like us; so that didn't improve his position."

“If he threatened you, Sturdith, had we better go into the wood? you know he may be there still.”

“Why, Marion, *you* are never afraid, are you, darling? If it had been Clementina, I shouldn’t have been surprised; but you—”

“No, Sturdith,” she answered, in a timid way; “no, I never knew what it was to be afraid, at least, not for myself.”

Sturdith said nothing; but he pressed the little delicate hand that had dropped into his, and his eyes glistened with love and happiness.

There was now but a short winding path for them to pass, and then they found themselves in one of the broad rides that had been cut through the wood. On either side gigantic beeches and old gnarled oaks stretched their bared limbs out, as if blessing those who were passing beneath them; and a thick underwood—a tangled maze of briar and hazel—or here and there a less impene-

trable covert of fern sheltered the game, which scampered away on their approach. There was still a little snow on the ground—not a large white boundless coverlet—but patches here and there, waiting, as the old adage hath it, for more snow to come and take them away. Here and there a rabbit, more venturous than the rest, contented herself with scampering but a few paces away, and then, almost within reach of their shadow, continuing her frugal repast. Perhaps that rabbit's instinct taught it that they were no hunters that were trespassing upon its pastures,—that theirs were no thoughts of prey, of death! Perhaps that rabbit regarded them with much the same feelings as the first rabbit regarded the first man in the blameless innocence of Eden.

They walked on, that fond, loving pair,—each no thought, no wish, no hope, beyond the other. He was bending over her, and his eloquent eyes were speaking—speaking

almost as plainly as his lips. While she,—oh, how beautiful she looked in that morning dress! How becomingly the warm shawl fell over her graceful figure. One tress escaped from the ribbon, by which it had been so hastily bound that morning, fell down, in all its auburn luxuriance, a fair contrast to that dark woollen shawl; and her dress, she had gathered it up, as ladies do, to prevent its dragging in the wet, and so it revealed her pretty feet, encased in the prettiest of boots. She had not hurried over that part of her toilette; they were laced as carefully as ever.

Happy, happy pair! What is happiness? Why is that neighbour of mine to have it to his full, and why is it to be denied to me? And why is it that it is given us for a time? Why, after we have been petted by it, courted by it, fondled by it, when we have learned to appreciate its full value, to know what it is to have,—is the cup, we have been permitted

to drink of so deeply, dashed from our still thirsting lips? And why are we left to a desolation as great as Job's?

O, Almighty, inscrutable providence, teach us to see mercy in thy corrections as well as in thy blessings !

And now I forbear to follow that happy pair, for they are no words for us to hear that they are breathing to each other. Walk on then, happy pair, and, Sturdith, look to her, for she is no common rustic beauty that is trusting to you. Then guard her safely, Sturdith, and keep her for your own, and love, cherish, and protect her, as she is ready to love, honour, and obey you.

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE were some absentees when they assembled for breakfast a little before eleven the next morning. Indeed, at first, Sir Anthony and Lord Deymont had been alone, but Lady Tyler and her hostess joined them almost immediately, and Clementina's pretty voice was audible directly afterwards, as she tripped down the stairs side by side with her cousin Guy.

Miss Tyler was a little later when she joined the party in the breakfast-room. There were two great black circles round her eyes, which told a tale of a weary, sleepless night. She

looked round the room hastily, but he was not there yet, and so she sat down quietly to a very poor pretence at a breakfast.

And what meal is there like a real, good, well-managed breakfast? Lunch is an unnecessary hurry;—dinner an abominable formality; abroad, a *table d'hôte* is a miserable infliction of ill-cooked supernumerary dishes. Afternoon tea is sociable, but then it is a ladies' meal, and it spoils your dinner; but breakfast, with a good appetite, and an easy conscience,—there is nothing like an English breakfast.

I do not mean one of those stiff formalities, where the butler makes the coffee and the tea on a side-table, and tall footmen hand you round the little modicums—mushrooms, fish, omelettes, rolls, and so forth—that fashion permits you to partake of—but I mean a well-managed breakfast table, such as there was at Deymont at the time that I am writing of, where the servants were rigidly excluded;

where her ladyship superintended the tea, and Lady Clementina presided over the coffee, where my lord would get up and look at the "Times," which came down by the early train, and was always placed on the side-table.

For they were stirring days, those. This was the Christmas when the Parliamentary war had waxed so hot,—when Mr. Disraeli's budget had been thrown out and Lord Derby forced to resign—when people talked learnedly about house tax, and malt tax, and quoted Sir James Graham upon the pros and cons of direct and indirect taxation. Lord Deymont had fallen, for Lord Deymont had held a place in the household during Lord Derby's administration. Lord Sturdith and Sir Anthony had been unsuccessful; they had both voted in the minority. It's no use, you won't find their names in the Division List; I told you in the first chapter that I had altered all the names, so don't turn back, as I did, who, knowing everything, as Mr. Kingsley says of himself,

knew their real names. Don't turn back, I say, to the dusty old volume of Hansard, but believe that this is as true as the rest of the story.

But it was all over now—even the last scene. Mr. Disraeli's apology—Sir J. Graham's compliments—Lord John's butter—Colonel Sibthorp's panegyric—it had all been played out; Parliament had been adjourned, and Lord Sturdith and Sir Anthony had hurried out of London in time for the Hicklebury ball.

"Lady Caroline Harbord has a baby, I see," began Lady Deymont, quoting from the supplement, which she had studied while she had been waiting for her guests.

"Has she?—a boy?" asked Lady Tyler.

"No—unluckily it's a girl."

"Better luck next time," chimed in Sir Anthony.

"The gales were fearfully heavy every-

where on Christmas day. There is a dreadful list of casualties."

"Oh, papa," said Lady Clementina, "we went yesterday to see that poor witch elm which was blown down. It makes such a dreadful gap."

"Oh, indeed, Clementina, I must go and see it myself. No more news from the East, Sir Anthony."

"No news is good news, I hope—but I fear that there will be worse to follow, before we have done with Constantinople. No one going to fight Johnny, for London, is there, my Lord?"

Lord Deymont laughed. "Not they; everyone's out of town. By-the-bye, Harderis has got peppered in the legs out shooting."

"Serves him right, for voting the wrong way last Thursday week! Hang it! I wish he had been hit before."

Guy looked up with a smile. "After all, it

would only have made," he said, "the majority one less."

"Don't you turn Radical, young man," gravely reproved old Sir Anthony. *En passant*, Radical, with Sir Anthony, stood for everything except Derbyism.

"Will you be ready to start at twelve, Tyler?" asked Lord Deymont, after a pause.

"I ready—of course, I shall be—but these youngers won't. Here's this nephew of yours the only one down."

"I think we might send up to them and ask them when they will be ready," and his lordship got up to ring the bell.

Guy jumped up to save the old peer trouble, and reached the bell first; he was going to ring it when Lord Deymont called out, "Stop, Guy, don't ring, now I think of it I will go myself."

"Let me go," answered Guy, "I should like to save you the trouble."

"Well, if you'll go to Lawless, Guy, I'll

go to Sturdith"—and the old peer walked off; perhaps he was afraid there were other inducements which might prevent his son from joining the shooting party that morning.

As for Guy, he followed at once. If he could have found an excuse, he would have been very glad to have given the pheasants a holiday from his Westley-Richards—but what could he say? A jolly row there'd have been, if he had boldly stated his intention to stay at home with Clementina. No, no, that would never have done; the best thing he could do was to help them get Lawless out of the way.

And so, thinking much in this sort of way, he walked quickly through the long passage and knocked at Lawless' door.

There was no answer at first, so he knocked again, and received a very sleepy, "Come in!" in reply.

Lawless was in bed, looking the very picture

of tired sleep. He had half drawn the clothing over his face—no doubt to hide every bit of light he could from him and had almost dropped asleep again since he had answered Guy's knock.

“Come, old fellow, it's very late—you ought to be up. Lord Deymont wants to know whether you will be ready to come out shooting at twelve.”

Lawless yawned, stretched himself, and rubbed his eyes. “What time is it now?” he asked.

“Now,—Why it's half-past eleven. “Come, do make haste,” as Lawless turned round again and laid himself down. “We are all down but you and Sturdith.”

“I am so tired,” pleaded Lawless.

“Why so it seems. Fancy you being the first to knock up! No one would have given you credit for that. That's a good fellow,” for Lawless sat up in bed—“I will go down and tell them that you will be down by

twelve"—and Guy turned on his heel to walk out of the room.

"I say, Deymont," said Lawless.

"Well," said the other, returning.

"I wish you'd tell Lord Deymont that I shan't go out shooting."

"Not go out shooting?"

"No, Deymont;" and here Lawless stretched himself again. "I'm not up to it to-day."

"Nonsense, old fellow, you'll be better when you are down; besides, what will Lord Deymont say?—indeed, you must come."

"Indeed, I can't, Deymont; besides, I must go over to Sturdith. I've got to see the agent."

"The agent will keep till to-morrow."

"No, indeed, he won't. I wish you'd ask Lord Deymont to lend me a horse,—then I can start directly after breakfast."

"Why, the ground is like a rock, it is so hard frozen."

"Oh, no; it has thawed a great deal since last night! It is capital going. At least," he added, correcting himself, "it must be, I am sure, by the feel of the air this morning."

"Well, I shall go and tell them how sulky you are," and Guy left the room.

"Well, what news of the captain?" was Sir Anthony's question, as Guy re-entered the dining-room.

"The captain had overslept himself," was the laughing answer, "but I woke him sufficiently to make him sit up in bed."

"What, he hadn't even begun to get up?" said Lord Deymont.

"I am afraid it was almost worse; he was asleep."

"When did he say that he would be ready to start?"

"Why, he told me to say that he was too tired to go out shooting, but he hoped that you would lend him a horse, as he wanted to ride over to Sturdith on business."

“What on earth shall we do for guns?—what with Lawless and Sturdith—”

“What about Sturdith, Uncle Deymont; can’t he come?”

“Oh,” said Sir Anthony, laughing, “Sturdith has eloped with your sister, it seems. So that doesn’t look like shooting, does it?”

“Not exactly, Sir Anthony; but can’t you find them?”

“No, Guy,” said Lady Deymont, “it seems they went out before any of the household were up.”

“Leave them to themselves, Lady Deymont,” interrupted Sir Anthony. “They’ll come in when they are hungry; I’ll warrant me they are doing all the mischief in their power. Putting up the pheasants where we are going to shoot, or some such amusement.”

“Perhaps they’ll be in time after all.”

“Not a bit of it. Not a bit of it. It all comes of that mischief-making little imp, love. A good shot like Sturdith, too! I warrant me

Lawless' is just the same disease. Mind what you're about, Deymont, and keep yourself clear from his clutches."

Guy hardly dared raise his eyes. Clementina was busily employed buttering her toast.

When Lawless came down, three-quarters of an hour later, the gentlemen were just preparing to start. Sturdith and Miss Deymont had not come in yet; so there were only three guns. They all bantered him about his not shooting. Lord Deymont swore that he had seen the ghost. Sir Anthony declared that he was in love, and warned him to profit by his (Sir Anthony's) example. Lawless told them all that he was only tired—so tired, that he wasn't fit to hold a gun; besides he had business at Sturdith, which he was very glad to get an opportunity of doing. Was very sorry that he had disappointed them, but there would be more left for them to shoot; wished them good sport, and went to his breakfast.

"I really wish," said Lord Deymont, as he went out of the room, "that I had not put Lawless into the haunted room?"

"Why?"

"The poor fellow looks so out of sorts. You know some people are afraid of these things."

"Nonsense," said Sir Anthony. "I'll lay my life that Lawless never knew what it was to be afraid of anything."

"I don't know, Tyler," his lordship replied, "but I should be very glad if I could undo last night's work, and put him somewhere else."

"Pish! he's out of sorts with last night's ball. Somebody wasn't kind enough to him there, I suspect."

CHAPTER IX.

THERE are some people in this world—perhaps I should be almost right if I were to substitute all for some—there are then people in this world, who, if they have a sorrow, and more especially a secret sorrow—a sorrow which admits of no partner in it—think that there is no remedy like solitude for their grief, and so these people avoid their relations and their friends, shutting themselves up from the world, till they fancy that the world is against them, and are driven on by slow degrees to hate the world and all that is best in it.

And yet these people—I would ask them seriously, are they right—are they wise—in what they do? Can they not remember some friend having burst in upon their retirement, whose intrusion at the time they fancied they could only just endure, but whose visit, when it was past—past recall—they looked back at as a bright oasis in the desert of their solitude?

Shakspeare, that great master of human nature, knew this right well. This is why he painted Romeo, “underneath the grove of sycamore,” and stealing home to “private, in his chamber, pen himself.” This is why he made good Benvolio and mad Mercutio break in on his love-sick loneliness, and persuade him, even against his will, and despite his protestations, to go to a ball,—for it was a ball, and a very good one, that fatal masque of old Capulet’s!

And if there can be sorrow in love—and who will deny this?—had not Lawless good

cause for sorrow that morning? He had come down from London the evening before, fearing, from what he had heard, that Sturdith was in greater favour than he could have wished; he had been slighted at dinner, publicly snubbed, so he thought, in the ball-room; then the whole truth had been told him without a word of preparation, or a word of pity; and now, worse than all, he had to stay on in the same house, with a raw wound, and no prospect of any salve to heal it.

Now mind, I am not for a moment saying that these were Lawless' thoughts that morning. I had much rather have him judged by his actions than his thoughts, so I do not intend to trouble you with the latter; and the little reflection the last paragraph contains, I merely suggest as a reflection which you, or I, or anyone else might have made, who had known of Lawless' love, and of the events of the last evening.

But whether these were his thoughts or no, I am inclined to think that he could have found no better way of passing a forced loneliness, than on horseback. Talk of dogs—no dog was ever yet the same thing as a horse to an unhappy man. The poor dog—be its approaches ever so insinuating—meets too frequently with a rebuff from a moody heart; but if a man mounts a horse, whether he acknowledges it or no, he cannot help thinking of his horse, and that thought, or rather the action which that thought induces, is a beneficial balm.

And when Lawless rode out that morning, perhaps he was happier than he had been since he had come to Deymont. He was dotingly fond of riding; and the great black hunter, three parts bred, well up to Lawless' fifteen stone, and three stone more, was no unworthy brute for so consummate a rider. He was fresh, for the long frost had consigned him to a dreary imprisonment in his

stable; and, as he sniffed the fresh air, he neighed and kicked, and snatched at the bit. He would have pulled the reins from a less experienced horseman's hands.

And though Lawless was only dressed in a shooting jacket and trousers, the helpers stood by the archway, through which he passed, to look at the best rider in all the county, and turned away to praise to each other his firm seat and his light hand.

It could hardly have been to satiate the gaze of Lord Deymont's grooms that Lawless rode so leisurely down the park. His horse was pulling all the way, but he paid no heed to that. I doubt if even the Wizard* could have burst away from that iron vice.

And so he rode very slowly down the park. Whatever it was that he was thinking of, the frown that he wore seemed to indicate that it was no pleasant subject. Now and then he

* Not Professor Anderson, or any of the fraternity, but a colt of that name, winner of the 2000 Guineas, and second in the Derby in 1860, and a noted puller.

would stare intently at some tree that he was passing; but it was with the vacant indifferent look of one who heeds not that which he is gazing at.

At the slow pace at which he was going, it took him nearly a quarter of an hour to reach the lodge gates. He passed through them at the same leisurely pace, and leaped his horse over the low wattle, which you may still see there, dividing the road from the down. Lawless knew well where he was now. Every inch of this country he had passed over with the hounds before him. There was down for miles and miles in the direction of Sturdith.

His horse seemed to know it too, for he neighed, and sprang right up into the air, and then shook his head as he felt the tightened rein; but he was indulged at last, for, leaning forward, his rider gave him his head, and in a moment they were bounding over the downs at a sharp canter.

It was, as Lawless had said before breakfast,

much better going than could have been anticipated. The frost was wonderfully out of the ground. The horse never slipped. Had it been a hunting day in November, the ground where they then were could hardly have been in better order.

Whatever Lawless' thoughts were, his mind seemed ill at ease; he was riding with a loose rein, apparently paying little heed to his horse. There was a frown on his brow, and now and then he bit his lips; and once or twice he flogged his own leg, not as a jockey will do to steal a race, but as if he was driving off some thought that was sitting on him so blackly.

He might have ridden a mile when the ground rose a little, and he leaned forward as you may see a man do out hunting. The gallant beast answered gaily to the call, and sprang forward at a gallop. It was all open down; there were five miles before him of such going as this. Up that slope, and then

down again. Another mile over; Lawless' brow was a little less heavy. There was a steeper slope in front of him, and the pace had begun to tell, for the black eased up a little as he faced the hill. For the first time in all that ride Lawless seemed conscious that he was riding, for he drove the spurs into his horse's flanks, till the gallant brute jumped up in the air, and then plunged forward again faster than ever.

When they reached the top of the hill, the pace had told, indeed. The black was covered with foam. He went shorter, too, in his stride now, and once or twice even rolled in his gallop. I doubt if Lawless had ever ridden harder to hounds than he had been riding that morning.

Still he did not pull up, but rattled him down the next hill at the same wild pace. The down narrows very much at this spot; and at the bottom runs the high road from Spinwell. Lawless seemed to be

making—at least his horse was making—towards it. There was a sheep-fold, that is to say, a square enclosure of hurdles, just the sort of place a young fellow would have leaped over on his way home from a blank day. Easy enough if you went steadily at them, but not so easy for a tired horse at that mad pace. It would require a very clever, fresh horse at that pace to get over the second flight.

To the south-east of the fold, skirting the high road, a row of oaks had been planted some fifty years ago. The few withered leaves that will cling to an oak throughout the winter had shaded the feeble sun, and so it happened that, just between the hurdles, the ground was hard and hoary still.

But I doubt whether Lawless noticed either hurdles, or ground, or anything else; he was going on at the same mad pace, and it was not till the black had cleared the first hurdle

that he seemed to recollect that he was on horseback.

And it was high time that he should do so!—on a tired horse, just over a flight of hurdles; another flight thirty yards in front; the pace somewhere about thirty miles an hour,—the ground as slippery as ice. He had just time to “sit down,” take a pull at him, give him one vigorous “rib-binder,” and send him at it. But it was no use!—the poor tired brute slipped, struck his breast against the hurdles, shot his rider—that was fortunate,—right over his head, and then rolled over himself, struggled, rose, fell again, and finally managed to regain his legs in about the same time as Lawless had picked himself, his hat, and his whip up.

It is wonderful how being forced to think, or better still, being forced to act, drives care from a man's shoulders. Here was Lawless in a pretty plight,—covered with mud, his hat

stove in, his horse in as sorry a condition as himself—five miles from Deymont, at least. Surely it wasn't satisfactory, but still the cloud had entirely left his face; there was not a single wrinkle on all his front, as he led the horse quietly down to the high road.

Just below this Lawless remembered that there was a lane leading from a little hamlet. He had passed it more than once out hunting. It was this little hamlet that he was making his way to; and it was not far off, for within three hundred yards after he had left the high road he pulled up at the door of a little inn—it bore the sign of a Swan,—where good accommodation was advertised for man and horse.

There was a man standing at the door who has to play his part in this little history; he was nearly as tall as Lawless, possibly of a lighter build; it might though have been the dress he wore that made one think so.

There he stood, this man, or rather leaned

against the wall, nigh six foot in height, if he were an inch; though it was so cold he had taken off his coat, and rolled up the sleeves of the clean linen shirt that he had on. Was it vanity that had made him to do so? Was it to expose the knotted strength of his bronzed arms?

Look at him again, at his broad sinewy shoulders, and his bold extended chest. Just look at the strength of his back, and the girth of his thighs. Every limb in exquisite proportion; not an ounce of superfluous flesh; not a muscle that told of a weak part. A majestic listless pillar of strength he leaned against that cottage door.

Black hair, black eyes, and white teeth, and perhaps more than all, the red-brown tint of his skin, seemed to tell a tale of eastern origin. If so, his appearance did not discredit the proverbial beauty of the race. Those black eyes, so listless now, had a fire slumbering in them that was ready at any

moment to burst into a flame. That straight nose and well-curved nostril were fitter for a prince than a peasant lad, and there was a contemptuous sneer on his well-chiselled lips that Lawless would have hardly brooked, had his thoughts allowed him to notice it.

He never moved from the position that he was in as Lawless came up. A very close observer might have noticed him steal one long attentive glance toward the latter; but he never moved. It never seemed to strike this peasant lad to touch his hat to the gentleman, but Lawless roused him from his reverie.

“Where’s the ostler, my lad?”

“What if he isn’t here, sir?” replied the man, in a tone much more respectful than might have been expected.

“Why, in that case, I suppose I must groom the horse myself. Can you groom a horse, my man?”

“Aye, and ride him too, sir, better than any of your liveried lacqueys.”

And the man led the horse off to the stable, while Lawless went inside and turned into the little apology for a coffee-room. The landlady had been doing her best to light a fire for him, and she had succeeded so far that there was plenty of smoke, but very little flame.

Lawless sat down in the most comfortable of the three wooden chairs that were in the room. He had enough to think of without this unlucky accident. The horse, it was true, wasn't hurt in the least; still it is not a pleasant thing to go home to a man's house after you have thrown down the best horse in his stable. So I think that Lawless was almost justified in being grave that morning.

The first thing he was conscious of, was hearing, in a very sweet voice,

“Would you please to have some brandy and water, or anything to drink, sir?”

And looking up, he found standing quite close to him, a rare gem of rustic beauty.

Luxuriant hair, of the very lightest auburn, drawn slightly off her face, so as to leave the prettiest of ears completely uncovered, and gathered into a thick well-cared-for knot behind; a complexion that, notwithstanding the constant exposure it had to undergo, was as free from freckles as a new born babe's; a light blue merry smiling eye, with long eyelashes and pretty dark eyebrows; lips of the ripest hue, the most tempting diminutiveness, and teeth as purely white as Eve's, before she had brought decay into the world by eating forbidden fruit.

Though this poor peasant girl had no stays to help her, you could not help seeing what a delicate waist nature had bestowed upon her. She had looped up her neat cotton dress,—for she had been busy with household work. So you had a peep at her slender ankle. There was a grace about her movements, too, that

seemed to rival the music of her voice. In a word, she was a jewel in a rough setting; but the very roughness of the setting enhanced the charm of the gem which it encircled.

Pretty as she was, though, Lawless paid but little heed to her; he answered, almost gruffly, that he would have some brandy and hot water,—“mind the water *is* hot,”—and turning round, stared straight out of the little window close to where he was sitting.

Perhaps the damsel was not accustomed, and (would it not be only giving human nature its due to add, not quite pleased?) to have so little notice taken of her pretty face; for just as she was going out of the room, she met the man to whom Lawless had consigned his horse, and looking up into his face with something more than a smile, said,

“The gentleman will have some brandy and water, Jim—will you take it him?”

“Brandy and water, Mary?—come along and give it me;” and putting his arm round

the girl's waist, he drew her from the room.

Had Lawless not been so very absent, so very intently engaged at looking at nothing, he would have heard something very like a kiss and a giggle, just as the door was closing.

In two minutes Jim came back; a tumbler with some brandy in it, some smoking hot water, and some lump sugar. Lawless in an unconscious way threw down half-a-crown.

"No, you may keep the change. By-the-bye, you are not the ostler, are you?"

"No, not I, but I've a liking for the place; and so, as I'm a good deal about 'The Swan,' you see I help the master—" he paused. Lawless had sunk into his old attitude again; he had mixed his brandy and water and tasted it; Jim had turned to leave the room; but just as he reached the door he seemed to have changed his mind, for he came back and said quite in a reproving, patronizing way,

“You should not have gone at those hurdles, Captain Lawless. No horse could have got over them to-day.”

Lawless started.

“You saw me, then,—I thought no one was by.”

The gipsy, for such you have already guessed he was, smiled; but he did not notice the interruption, as he went on.

“I knew at six o’clock this morning that a gentleman would come down over those hurdles to-day. It’s all in the stars. It’s no use fighting against ’em.”

Lawless looked up; the man’s speech was strange enough to attract his attention for a moment.

“I should like to look at your hand, sir.”

“Bah, man—I am tired—go away, can’t you!”

“If you will let me look at your hand, I will.”

“What can you want to see my hand for? It’s muddy, like my clothes, with my fall.”

“Some hands have worse than mud on them, Captain Lawless. I beg pardon, sir,” for Lawless started, “here is a brush. I will soon have the mud off your clothes,” and he set to work with a will, and soon erased every trace of his fall. “I deserve some reward for that, sir. May I see your hand?”

Lawless yielded, more for the sake of peace than for any other reason, and laid his broad hand open on the deal table. The gipsy bent over it for some three minutes; he never moved a muscle while he was examining every line, and then he laid his own hand down beside Lawless’.

“It is very, very strange,” he muttered.

Again he turned himself to the task. First he gazed at one hand, then at the other. There was some connection between them that he was working out.

At length he spoke.

"I don't suppose, sir, that you would believe me if I were to tell you your fortune, but it matters little—I wanted to see your hand for my own sake. Something told me that it would be so, and so it is."

Lawless looked up in a stupid way; he could not help listening,—the man rambled on so strangely.

"Yes, sir, I wanted to see your hand, and I'll tell you why. You're a rich gentleman, and I'm a poor gipsy lad; but you and I have more to do with each other. Why you've as much to do with me, as I with Mary yonder."

Again Lawless looked up, but he did not interrupt the man.

"Look here, Captain! look at those lines in your hand—here they are in mine, too. That one, the shortest, is your life; that other, is mine. See how they bend together just here. Yours crosses mine—I know I've lived all the way up to that cross. It won't be many days ere you do me mortal harm.

Don't be frightened. It won't kill me, though it will separate me from poor Mary, yonder. Our tracks are very different after that, but we meet again once, five years hence; and that time it is I who shall have the best of it."

There was a smile on Lawless' face, as he shook his head in reply.

"You don't believe a word I say. By heaven, you shall! There are other lines on your hand than those I have shown you. They tell me that you have loved a fair, tall young lady. You shall never marry her. They tell me that you are nearer her to-day than you have ever been before, and yet you are further off. Do you know why you are nearer?—It is because when you get home you shall find your rival dead. Do you know why you are further off?—It is because she had never such reason to hate you as she has now."

There was something noble in this strange

young fellow's attitude as he thundered out the last speech—he was angry at having been disbelieved before. Surely he never would have staked his powers on so strange a theme had he been himself. There was no Delphic mystery here—Sturdith's death—it could mean nothing else. Sturdith's death—why it was impossible!

And yet when Lawless heard this quaint story, he turned as pale as death himself. Every drop of colour that had been in his face fled away at once, and he rose and laid a trembling hand on the gipsy to detain him, saying,

“Stay; you don't know what it is you have said.”

“Know,” replied the man, with a contemptuous sneer. “Know, as well as I know that I shall be in prison unjustly within two days.”

“But if you know that why don't you fly hence at once?”

“ Aye, fly while they damned and blackened me with their filthy lies, which they call justice. How could I take Mary with me? No, no! Let the guilty fly; I bide here, and dare them all.”

He turned round and left Lawless alone.

I have never tried to show you Lawless' thoughts—I am not going to do so now—but I will spend the three minutes in which he sat there, in telling you once for all that I am no believer in any superstition, least of all fortune-telling. It is quite certain, however, that this wild gipsy, Jim, did tell Lawless his fortune—much as I have repeated it;—but I leave it for the reader to determine, as the story goes on, how much that he told him was guess work, and how much he derived from knowing more of other matters than anyone else.

Nor would it be fair to myself if I did not add that I foresee that my critics will turn up their noses, and say that I borrowed all

that is good in this story from Mr. James's most interesting novel. I can only say that the whole of this story was composed to the very minutest detail of the plot two years before I had ever read "The Gipsy," and though I was not satisfied with my labours at that time, and discarded the whole of my narrative, yet in re-writing the story now I have simply put it into a new dress. Indeed, in this particular chapter the dress can hardly be said to be new.

But to return. In about three minutes Lawless got up; he walked very moodily, with his hat slouched over his eyes, out of the house. Just outside the little inn stood Jim, holding the black. The noble brute shied as Lawless tried to mount him—he had not forgotten his fall; but it would have been an awkward customer indeed that would have prevented Lawless getting on to his back. His horse's shying had only the effect of recalling him to himself, and he sprang up and

took the rein, turning his horse's head to shake off Jim's hold, as proud and erect as ever.

But Jim did not let go; but leaning forward, whispered,

"When you find him dead, think of me; when you hear that I am in prison think of me; and think of me five years hence, and don't forget to meet me."

Something in this man's manner had tamed Lawless, for he used no oath, no violence, to get rid of him; and, when the man let go his hold at last, he rode on so slowly that Jim might have kept up with him at an easy walk.

So slowly! how different from that furious ride that morning. Could this be the same man who had taken no denial from his horse up that steep bit of down? So changed now as he jogged along at a foot's pace on the road homewards.

Once he pulled up. It was just where

another road turned off on his right, and led to a station on the South Western Railway. You could just see, from the spot, the red disc of the signal post. But, whatever his thoughts were, when he paused there, he heaved a sigh, after a few moments, and jogged on homewards again at the same slow pace.

And so it happened that the sun had well-nigh run out its short winter day journey, that it was close on three o'clock before Lawless re-entered Deymont Park. He had taken a short cut which had brought him to the little-used lodge, where Lady Deymont kept some of her poultry. There seemed to be only one small girl in, who curtsied as Lawless passed and thanked her; and so he rode on at the same slow pace towards the house itself.

It was not until he was actually in sight of the stable yard that he noticed anything different to usual. And perhaps, if the gipsy's tale had not been still ringing in his ears, he

would not even then have given much heed to the little knot of persons who seemed to be talking somewhat excitedly to each other. Lawless recognised the tall form of Warleigh, the keeper, among them. He seemed to be the great authority to whom the more elevated portion of the community were attending ; but none the less the pages, the scullery-maids, the helpers, the *οἱ πολλοί* of Deymont's servants' hall, were eagerly questioning the half-dozen beaters, who one and all seemed to have been elevated into a position of unusual importance ; but more than all this Lawless' eyes lit upon a strange gig which had apparently been driven fast, for the horse which had just been taken out of it was standing covered with foam. Lawless did not recognise the gig. Still there was a medical cut about it, so plain that he hardly dared ask the groom, as he held his horse,

“Has any—what has happened?”

There was a tear in the honest fellow's

eye—he had lived for a long time at Deymont—as he answered,

“Poor Lord Sturdith, sir, has—” but Lawless was already half way to the house before the rest of the answer to his question came.

CHAPTER X.

THE gipsy, when he left Lawless, turned with a slow, measured pace towards the inn door. Just as he reached it, he heard Mary's voice in the passage,

"I tell ye I'll not,—go away; I'll none of you,"—and saw that she was in hot altercation with another man.

It only cost Jim a slight effort to take this fellow by the collar of the coat and fling him outside the door.

"What's he been saying to ye, Mary?" he asked, putting his arm round the latter's waist.

Mary looked down, and hesitated for a moment; and the man whom Jim had handled so roughly answered her in a sulky tone,

“Saying to her—were but a saying what you say to her dozen times, be bound, in the day.”

“Well, then, close your ugly mouth, and don’t let me find yer speaking to Mary again.”

The other retreated till he was well out of Jim’s reach, and then said,

“Mighty fine, mighty fine, Mister Jim, while you’re here; but yer don’t think now, do yer, that Warleigh will let yer go on with yer poaching,—living here all day, and shooting pheasants all night,—’t isn’t likely, that’s what ’t isn’t. What did yer empty yer gun at this morning, eh? I’ll be sworn ye had a shot, for I saw the burnt cap on’t,—that’s what I did.”

At the beginning of this speech Jim had turned to Mary, and was leading her slowly

away. At the middle he turned round so suddenly that the other stopped for a moment and drew back still more; but, at the allusion to his gun having been fired, Jim turned away again.

“Will yer come for a walk with me, Mary?” he asked, after a pause of a few minutes.

They walked together down the lane by which Lawless had reached the Swan, and they sat down on the bank beneath the row of oaks which skirt the high road.

“If Ned Raggles, Mary,” Jim said, at last, “misuses thee, I’ll,—I’ll—”

He bent a tough hazel that he had gathered in his walk till it broke: I know not whether the action was typical of his intentions towards Ned Raggles. He broke this tough hazel-stick, and, flinging it from him, continued,

“But what’s the use of my saying so, when I shall be away from my own darling?”

“Jim,” said Mary, raising two large watery eyes till they met her lover’s, “you going away, going away from me?”

“Aye, Mary, and from no will of my own, you may take your oath; but these hounds, Mary, will be on me, and—and—”

The poor fellow stopped, and the girl broke in, passionately,

“But let me go with you, Jim,—anywhere—everywhere. Let me go with my own Jim.”

“What?” replied the other, “to prison, lassie! Nay, ’tis no place for your pretty face.”

“To prison, Jim!” she answered, very slowly; “but ’twill be,” she continued in a lighter tone, “but for a short time,—and then ye will give over this poaching, Jim; for my sake yer will?”

But Jim did not answer her immediately; he pulled up two or three tufts of grass, and then plucked them to pieces blade by blade.

“Mary,” he said at last, “mindest the gentleman I was talking to to-day?”

“What, he who rode the black horse, Jim, and wanted brandy and water?”

“Yes! yes! d’ye know his name, Mary?”

“No, not I.”

“’Twas Captain Lawless, Mary, the squire of Sturdith, yonder.”

“What,—where you got me the young woodpigeon?”

“Yes, Mary; d’ye think ye’d remember him?”

“Law, Jim, ’twould be hard to forget such a face as his. There he sat, as glum as the parson on Sunday, and after all, he hadn’t even broken the horse’s knees.”

“Then listen, Mary. If anything were to happen to me,—suppose I were to go away and leave you, or was in trouble,—very great trouble. You must go to Captain Lawless, and tell him who you are and what you are to me.”

"But you're not going away, Jim."

"Faith, Mary," he replied, trying to look gay, "there can be no harm in supposing; but remember 'tis Captain Lawless who you must go to if you ever want help."

"Lawks! Jim; but now he didn't look the kind of gentleman to do much for a poor girl like me."

"Ah! but he will, Mary; but if I'm here ye shall not want his help, and if I'm not here—" He broke off in the middle of his sentence, and frowned; then he said, "but let's go back to the Swan, Mary, for I'm not going to leave my own Mary all day."

And with his arm round her waist he led her back towards the Swan.

He had proceeded some little distance towards the inn before he stopped again. But after a while he drew her gently from the road, drew her towards a quiet foot-path, where they had often rambled alone together.

He dropped his hand from her waist, and walked on by her side, with his eyes bent on the ground. For more than a hundred yards no word passed between them.

But, after a few minutes, he raised his eyes, not to her; before he had turned them towards her they were arrested by another object.

A hawk poised in the air, in quest of prey!

A strange object to arrest a lover's attention. But then this fellow was a poacher; and his ideas, so it seemed from the remarks which had fallen from him, had been dwelling on poaching, and what is a hawk but a poacher?

Besides, too, there is no feeling so deeply imbedded in our nature,—or I might even say in animal nature,—as a love of the chase. There is an excitement, deny it though you may, in watching the habits of any beast of prey. We have got over now, at least in England, and I thank heaven for it! the means with which human nature in former

ages indulged itself in this respect. We have passed for ever the days when wild beasts were let loose in the amphitheatre to fight with men even wilder than themselves; or a bull was goaded to madness to satiate the gaze of the spectators of his fury. But though the practice may be altered, nature is still the same. Who, as a boy, or perhaps even later in life, has not matched a terrier to kill rats against time?

The strange thing too is that, on these occasions, the sympathy is always on the strongest side. Whoever thought of wishing that a rat might escape? We admire the skill of the terrier, as we do the eagle-eye and fell swoop of the hawk; and our sympathy is with the oppressor, not with the oppressed.

Jim laid his hand on Mary's arm, and pointed to the hawk. He said nothing for a few moments, but stood intently watching the bird, then he said,

“If I'd my gun, Mary—”

"You might do worse, Jim, than shoot the hawk."

"What, lassie, you think that if I gave the keeper so good a turn, I should be entitled to a few pheasants for my pains."

"Ah! Jim, I wish you'd no gun at all. I wouldn't mind letting the poor hawk live."

"He's gone for this time, at any rate, lassie," for the hawk, perhaps on hearing their voices, flew away. "But," he continued, and then again paused. "Ah see, Mary, there's the bird he was after," for a blackbird, starting from a hedge, flew hastily away, "safe out of yon fellow's clutches this time."

"Poor little thing!" said Mary.

"Ah! poor little thing!" replied her lover. "I'm right down glad you're safe. It seems to me, Mary," and here again he paused, and repeated, in a lower tone, "It seems to me that that blackbird got away to comfort me like, and that perhaps I shall be able to get away too out of their clutches."

"Jim!" said Mary, and she laid her hand on her lover's arm, "Jim, dear Jim, what is it? why won't you tell your own Mary? What is it that makes you so afraid to-day of prison. You never were afraid before. Not even when you were taken by Lord Deymont's keeper. Tell your own Mary, Jim, what is it you are afraid of now."

"Nothing, lassie," said the other, in a tone that contradicted the very terms of the speech. "Nothing, lassie,—wear a stout heart; the blackbird got away."

"Why won't you give up this poaching life, Jim? You told me to go to Captain Lawless if I wanted anything. Why don't you go to him and get him to give you honest work?"

"I hate their work," said the other. "Why shouldn't I shoot a pheasant as much as Lord Deymont or any of these squires here? 'Tis but a bird, and no more his than mine or yours. No more his than that black-

bird that got away from the hawk that tried to catch him. I'm glad he didn't, lassie."

"But, Jim, the laws give it them; and it must be right, or why should the laws give it them?"

"The laws, Mary; they make their laws themselves, and they make them to stamp on us poor country folks. What right have the laws to say that a pheasant is Lord Deymont's? Suppose the pheasant flies over to Squire Harborough's—it's Squire Harborough's, and if it flies over to this common, which is still left to the poor, why isn't it the first poor man's that can kill it?"

It was an argument that had puzzled wiser heads than Mary's. So she contented herself with doing what wiser people very often do, with shifting her ground to another where she felt safer.

"But, Jim, you know," she said, "you don't kill the game on this common. Perhaps you may be right here. But why do

you go inside the fence on to Lord Deymont's ground?"

"What right have people to land, lassie? God gave the land to us all, not all of it to Lord Deymont. What right has he to put up a fence, and call all inside it his?"

"What right, Jim? Why if we could turn him out of Deymont Park, any country fellow could turn my poor old father out of the 'Swan.' Think Jim, of the old man, he has lived in the dear old place all his life, and it would break his heart if he had to leave it now."

Jim felt uncomfortable; he could not answer such an argument in the mouth of his heart's choice, so he followed Mary's tactics and shifted his ground.

"Well, lassie, may be a man's house is a man's house, but that doesn't make the wild birds his. When they go out hunting, they follow the fox out of one man's ground into another's, and no one says them nay. What's

the difference between a fox and a pheasant that the rich man may kill one on another man's ground, and that it's poaching if a poor man kills the other; aye, for the matter of that, on his own ground—if he has any?"

Mary looked up at Jim's handsome face. Perhaps after all, the love of the chase which she had, in common with all, made her more than half-sympathise with him. Perhaps she was more afraid of the consequences than annoyed at the lawlessness of her lover's poaching; or perhaps, and this is more probable, she was simply unable, poor, ignorant country maid that she was, to answer her lover's last argument. But she looked at Jim's face, and dropping all argument, save the strongest of all a woman's one, she said,

"Jim, darling, you will give up poaching for my sake?"

Her hand dropped into his; a tear stood in her eye; and—

Fellowman! didst ever see a fair young

girl, thine own heart's love, pleading her cause, her hand in thine, and a tear swimming in her bright blue eye, and didst refuse her prayer? I think not, or, if thou didst, I think thee all unworthy of thy petitioner. For if I am right, she would not ask thee, were she not sure of thy love. And he who loves and can say nay to his true-love's tear—and he who cannot love—well, commend me to poor untutored faithful Jim!

He stood for some moments by her side without replying; and, in those moments, you could have noticed an entire change in his countenance. The thoughts which a hawk had given rise to, had driven him hastily and perhaps unintentionally to defend his former practice; the low voice of his lover had recalled him to better things. And, after a few moments' pause, he drew her gently towards him, and kissing her cheek, dimpled already with the smile that greeted one more victory,

“Lassie,” he said, “I promise thee I’ll never poach no more.”

I know that the sentence, if it is exposed to rigid criticism, breaks down ; that a double negative makes an affirmative, and that Jim might have gone poaching again without breaking the letter of his promise. What matters it? ’Twas the promise of the lip pressing her own happy cheek, not the promise that came from it in the shape of words that Mary trusted, and she knew that he whose arm was round her waist had never deceived her.

She did not thank him for his promise. She did not, with words at least, express her thanks. Yet, my reader, hadst thou been present, thou might’st have learned a lesson in the language of the eye.

Again Jim paused, and once again he picked a stick up from the ground, and broke it in his hands.

“Lassie,” he said, at last, “ye believe my promise, don’t ye?”

“Jim!” she replied, half-reprovingly, “me to doubt ye, Jim?”

“I knew it,—I knew it,” he said, “ye’d trust me ever, and—and—”

“And what, Jim?”

“And though I may have broken their laws and shot their game, ye don’t think I’d do worse, lassie?”

“Worse, Jim?”

“If they were to tell thee that I’d been—been—if I’d done wrong to anyone, ye’d not believe them, lassie?”

“Ne’er a word, Jim, ne’er a word.”

“They may say what they like of me; and shut me from the bright sun, and send me—yes, send me far from you. But I didn’t do it. I didn’t do it, and if you don’t believe them, lassie, I can bear it all.”

CHAPTER XI.

HARK back! hark back! Lawless has out-riden hounds, scent, and all. So try back, gentle reader; we must run with the rest of the pack.

Have you ever stayed at a large country house, where the gentlemen were shooting the home coverts, and keepers, dogs, and beaters assembled after breakfast, in front of the entrance hall? I know of no prettier picture than the sturdy fellows in their neat blue smocks, with their strong ashen sticks, waiting for the gentlemen. Probably, five or six couple of clumbers,

sniffing and restless, all impatient to begin; while the glorious retriever, who has grown old and deaf in long faithful service, reclines peaceably at the keeper's heels. The latter, probably, has a gun under each arm, and possibly, another in each hand, and is got up (of course) in brown velvet, with cord knee-breeches and gaiters, and a black wide-awake and cotton tie,—to my mind, the beau ideal of a good working dress.

Warleigh, Lord Deymont's keeper, had grown somewhat aged in service; but the sixty and odd summers that he had seen sate as lightly on the old man as thirty short years do on many a young one, for like Adam, in his youth, he "never did apply hot and rebellious liquors to his blood," and, therefore, old age had come upon him "frosty, but kindly."

Poor Warleigh used to say that he had seen Lord Deymont draw his first blood, as a boy of thirteen. It may have been quite

true, though I do not think that his case was "quite proven." But whether it was he who had instructed the young idea, in our father's time, to shoot, or no, there could be no doubt that, a generation later, it was Warleigh who had first taken Lord Sturdith out with him, who had praised him when he shot well, sighed when he missed the bird; that it was Warleigh whom Sturdith had loved to run off to when he had come home from his holidays, and wander with through the woods, perchance to see a hawk or to hear an owl; or wait at sundown and watch the 'cocks' as they came flapping along the rides, and wonder whether it was as hard as he heard people say to bring them down; it was Warleigh who had initiated him into all the mysteries of ferrets; it was Warleigh who had taught him to set a snare; in a word, Warleigh he regarded almost as a father. Had Warleigh's heart been probed, I think

that I should have found that he regarded Lord Sturdith almost as a son.

When Lord Deymont, Sir Anthony, and Guy came out, Warleigh took off his hat, and, bowing in a manner that would not have disgraced a courtier, wished them all "Good morning."

"Good morning, Warleigh," they all three answered. "We have a fine day, indeed," continued Lord Deymont; "are you ready?"

"Aye, my lord, we've all been ready here these last fifteen minutes. I beg pardon, will Lord Sturdith and Captain Lawless follow us?"

"Lord Sturdith is out, Warleigh; but I've left word for him to follow us as soon as he comes in. I am sorry to say that Captain Lawless is obliged to ride over to Sturdith, so that we shall not have his help."

"That's a pity," said the old keeper, regretfully; "we shall be few enough guns for Hilton Wood."

“Well, we must do our best, Warleigh. Sir Anthony has brought down some wonderfully straight powder from London.”

“Not much fault to find with Sir Anthony’s powder generally, my lord;” and the old man touched his hat again.

“Well, forward’s the word. Hector, old fellow, how are you, boy?” and his lordship gave the old retriever an affectionate pull of the ear, and the old dog looked up, and wagged his tail, in honest, hearty welcome.

“We’d better not go to Hilton Wood, I think, till late,” said the old keeper. “Harry, lad, just you run down, and rap at the gate close to the pond. You see, my lord, if we take Gerard’s copse first, and then beat through the long plantation, we may pick up an outlying pheasant or two in the open. Then, if we have time, we could take Stickle copse in our way; and we shall be driving everything before us to Hilton Wood.”

“Aye, and keep that for the last?”

"Yes, my lord; besides, then Lord Sturdith will have had more time to catch us; and we shall want guns sadly, in Hilton Wood."

"Leave Warleigh to take good care of Sturdith," whispered Sir Anthony to Guy.

"Ah, yes, indeed," was the answer. "I believe that Warleigh would think it a capital crime to shoot the best beat without the young lord. He dotes upon Sturdith as much as the rest of us."

"If that's the case, Guy, I should think that we shall have to postpone Hilton Wood. There isn't much chance of your sister letting Sturdith leave her to-day, eh?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Guy, laughing; "they must come in for breakfast at last, and then Aunt Deymont will pack him off."

They had walked on, by this time, a good way from the rest, so that Sir Anthony could say, without anyone else hearing him,

"Was there anything ever between your

sister and Lawless? You know we old fellows are privileged to ask questions."

"Never, that I know of; and I don't think that Marion ever keeps anything from me."

"You may be quite sure that Lawless was in love with her. I watched him pretty closely last night, at Hicklebury. And small blame to him, for she is a rare pretty girl." The old fellow had been watching Lawless, for he had hoped all night to see him pay a little more attention to his own daughter.

"Oh, I think that Lawless did admire Marion; he seemed out of sorts last night, and perhaps that had something to do with it;" and the conversation dropped.

I am not going to inflict upon my readers a long description of a good day's shooting. It has been told over and over again before now; and far better told than I could tell it. There were lots of pheasants in Gerard's copse. Guy missed four rocketers in succession; but then he made a magni-

ficient shot at a cock, which they had all missed, and he got a crack at with his second barrel, ninety paces off. Sir Anthony's two guns were hard at it all the time, rolling over rabbits as they darted across the little ride he was walking in. He was a dead shot at a rabbit, was Sir Anthony. For the matter of that, they all did their duty pretty well, for, when they laid the game down, outside Gerard's copse, and counted it over, they found two woodcocks, twenty-three pheasants (five of these were hens), two partridges (Sir Anthony had rolled these over—a long right and left shot),—they had got up very wild; four hares, and sixteen rabbits. Now, in my opinion, that's quite enough for three guns, in a short hour-and-a-half; and to say the truth, they were all tolerably contented.

Then they walked through the little bit of open. It was rough grass land, with fern and hazel growing on it. How the clumbers

enjoyed it, darting into a small fern covert, driving out of it half-a-dozen rabbits, and seeing them roll, poor little things, head over heels; but they (not the clumbers, nor the rabbits) didn't take long there; and then they all sat down by a great six-barred gate, that was always locked, except when the hounds were there; and then Warleigh brought out of the pony-cart, which had been sent to bring back the game, some wine, and some whisky, and some beer and some sandwiches, and some great hunches of bread and cheese for the beaters; and though the gentlemen could not eat, for they had only just breakfasted, they waited a good half hour, for, you know, it was the beaters' dinner time; and Lord Deymont, trust him, he never forgot his men.

Sir Anthony smoked a weed; he offered Guy one. I am afraid that you will think I have painted Guy as a most degenerate

scion of the Deymonts ; but I must tell the truth—Guy did not smoke. So Sir Anthony had to blow a cloud by himself.

“That was a queer story, Lord Deymont,” said Sir Anthony, between the puffs of his cigar, “that you told us at dinner yesterday.”

“It is a queer story ; but all ghost stories are queer, and, for my part, though my own house is haunted, I don’t believe in any of them.”

“Nor I either ; but still it is strange that they should be credited by so many sensible people. Is this story at Deymont well substantiated now ?”

“They thought so at the time, I believe ; but the ghost has so seldom appeared of late years, that it is almost forgotten.”

“Who is supposed to have seen it last ?”

“I have been thinking over that since last night at dinner. It was my old housekeeper. Soon after I married Lady Deymont, just

about the time that Sturdith was born; and Lady Deymont and I were abroad, so I know the date exactly."

Sir Anthony gave another puff, and taking the cigar out of his mouth, said,

"Tell us about it."

"The ghost hadn't been seen for years, and the old woman was sleeping in the haunted room, when in the middle of the night, just as the clock struck twelve, she woke up, and there she saw a lady, dressed much as the picture in Lawless' room is dressed, but paler and with flecks of blood on her face and clothes. Of course my poor old housekeeper was frightened out of wits; but she declares that the figure raising its forefinger said, 'hark!' and that the stable clock, though it had only just struck twelve, chimed nine; and, when it had finished, the figure spoke again in some such words as these—'only twice more: once to warn, once to punish; and then I sleep for ever!' "

"It's a queer story," said Sir Anthony, "What d'you think of it?"

"Think! why I think that my old house-keeper had eaten something that disagreed with her, and that she woke up,—it was a bright moonlight night,—and that her eyes rested on the ghost's picture I told you of. The rest I set down as imagination."

"I heard a most curious story the other day, apropos of ghosts," said Guy. "But it's almost too long to tell now."

"Let's have it," said Lord Deymont, "I like the beaters to have a good hour for their dinner, and it will give Sturdith more time to catch us."

"Very well, in that case we shall have time for my story. About fifty miles from London"—Bless thee, man, if you're good for an hour, I'd better begin another chapter.

CHAPTER XII.

“ABOUT fifty miles from London, a little way off the high road, stands Keston Manor House. An old red-brick building, with a long avenue of larches leading up the front door. I never saw—for I ought to tell you that I have seen the house as I learned this story when I was down in those parts on circuit, and indeed, was in court when the case which I am going to tell you of was tried—I never saw a house neglected, so literally tumbling to pieces as the old Manor House of the Keston’s. You could hardly see where the road between the larches had once been, so over-grown was

it with grass. The oak fence would have hardly kept a cat out, it was so rotten; and it was so absolutely impossible to tell where the lawn had once ended, and the field commenced.

“Squire Keston, who lived in it—and lived in it all alone—had never been seen outside his gates since he had returned there, thirty years before, after his father’s death. One old woman, the village postman’s wife, used to go there every day to cook his dinner, and put his things tolerably in order. No one else—not even the clergyman—was ever allowed to go into his room.

“And there never were, from what this old woman told me, two more uncomfortable rooms than those which the squire inhabited. The furniture was very old, and of the plainest description; there were no carpets, no curtains, the old man had not even a dozen books to pass the time with.

Yet he wasn’t poor. The rent roll of Keston

was at least two thousand pounds a year, and, what you will think still stranger, this old man was in his youth the most popular fellow in the whole county.

“Forty years before, he had fallen in love.”

“Ah,” said Sir Anthony, knocking the ashes off his cigar, “I felt sure that love was at the bottom of it.”

Guy laughed, but he went on. “He had fallen in love with a governess—a very pretty girl, but a governess. His mother, Lady Maria,—as proud a woman as ever lived,—would not hear of her son’s marriage with a governess. She swayed his father; Keston could not afford to marry without his father’s assistance, so he gave in, and the governess died.

“Lady Maria, seeing her son going about much as before his attachment, had fancied that he would soon get over it; but the governess, as I said, died. The day after her

funeral Keston left England, and never returned until after his mother's death.

“I am told that, when Lady Maria lay on what she knew was her death-bed, she sent the most pitiful letters to her son, begging him to return and imploring him to forgive her before she died. I am told too that Keston wrote back,—‘I swore over *her* grave never to forgive you, and by the eternal Heaven, I never will!’

“I only mention this horrid story to show you what sort of a person Keston was. After his mother's death he returned home, and lived the solitary life I have described.

“The village postman,—husband to the old woman whom I have mentioned before,—had to pass Keston's house every evening in his walk from the Crowgate post-office. This man had lived with the squire before the latter's affair with the governess; and, being in those days a light weight, had generally ridden his second horse for him out hunting.

Even after Keston returned, he never missed defending his old master. 'Ah,' was his favourite story,—'you should have seen him, as I did, near Cranbury brook the famous morning when the hounds met at the gorse bushes,—and not a man, and small blame to them either, for no one has cleared it since,—dared follow him.

"One evening, this old man was walking, as usual, from Crowgate home, when he met, so he told his wife, the squire getting over the park pailings, just at the spot at which the road is loneliest. 'Richard,' it seems, was 'himself again,' for he 'looked as young as he had been forty years before, and wore just the same expression, so the postman declared, as on the morning when he had cleared Cranbury brook.

"The old woman suspected, at first, that her husband was drunk; but, nevertheless, she was uneasy when she went to the house the next morning. She had good cause to be so,

for she found the squire hanging by the neck—dead.

“Of course there was an inquest. It seemed that the old man, after tying a rope to a beam in the ceiling, had stood on a chair, which, after adjusting the rope, he had kicked from under him.

“Not a thing had been moved in the room. Some money lying loose on the table had not been touched. The jury gave it suicide; and the postman swore that his old master’s ghost had appeared to him.

“The squire was dead—long live the squire! The new one was a captain in a cavalry regiment. He had gone into the cavalry, fancying that his uncle would be sure to make him a handsome allowance; but he never wrung a sixpence out of his strange old recluse of an uncle. It wasn’t for want of applying to the latter, though. The result was debt; and, a few months before his uncle’s death, a flight to Paris, to avoid his creditors.

“I suppose he thought that the good people of Keston had had enough of a resident squire, for he answered his solicitor’s letter, telling him of his uncle’s death, by sending them a list of debts that he desired might be paid, and by saying that he intended to set out for the east at once, and that he should not be home for some time.

“In fact, he sold his commission, and never returned home for two years and more. Even then he did not go down to Keston, but, meeting a friend—an officer in his old regiment—in London, was carried off by him, though it was a very difficult task to persuade him to go, to his father’s house in Leicestershire.

“Frobisher—this was his friend’s name—had one sister,—a very pretty girl, rather fast, I suspect, and perhaps, too fond, for a lady of hunting. She was engaged to a near neighbour of her father’s—a man named Vernon—a country gentleman, but not, I think, a very pleasing fellow. However, perhaps it is

prejudice on my part to say so ; at any rate, he was staying at the Frobishers, and all went swimmingly for some ten days.

“Keston had bought two magnificent horses, both of them well up to weight,—and the morning after they had been sent down to Leicestershire, he had taken Miss Frobisher to the stables to see them.

“Nothing would please the girl, after she had seen them, but to ride the mare, the lightest of the two ; and, to cut a long story short, it was decided that she should ride it two days afterwards.

“That day they had a magnificent run. Miss Frobisher and Vernon, who was always well mounted, rode side by side. Thirty minutes without a check over a grass country,—and thirteen stone pounded Vernon’s horse, and he called to Miss Frobisher to stop. ‘Not while the hounds are running,’ she answered, looking back at her lover ; he as he turned his horse’s head homewards, saw Keston, who

had been riding judiciously all day, join Miss Frobisher.

“The result of course was that Keston and Miss Frobisher finished the run together; and rode home twenty miles side by side afterwards.

“It seems,—as far as I can make the story out,—that Keston on his way home asked Miss Frobisher to give him her right glove as a remembrance of the ride. She laughed, and refused to do so without Vernon’s leave; Keston, who was as cool as a cucumber, offered to bet her a diamond necklace to a kiss, that Vernon gave it to him himself that very evening, and she took the bet.

“She ought to have been ashamed of herself, then,” said Sir Anthony. “She deserved to lose.”

“And she did lose,” said Guy, laughing. “At dinner Keston asked, turning to Vernon, the rule in betting, if the horse didn’t win, but made a dead heat of it?”

“‘Don’t you know that,’ was the answer, ‘put the odds together, and divide. But why?’

“‘Because I laid Miss Frobisher to-day my black horse against the gloves she wore that I beat her across the last fence, and we made a dead heat of it. Now, it’s impossible to divide the horse, so I give up my share to Miss Frobisher; but it’s quite clear that we each take one glove; I think I should like the right one,—that’s all right, isn’t it, Vernon?’

“‘Certainly,’ was the answer of the unsuspecting Vernon.

“The next morning Miss Frobisher overtook Keston who was walking alone in the long plantation, and held out the glove to him.

“‘I’d half a mind to tell all,’ she said, as she did so.

“I suppose that Keston would have been more than mortal, if he had not claimed payment of his real bet. But as ill luck would

have it, at that very moment, Vernon turned a corner and met them face to face.

“Of course, there was an awful row, and though, to do him justice, Keston tried to avoid it, there was a fight, and Vernon got terribly the worst of it—”

“The man in the right always does,” interrupted Sir Anthony.

“Well, he did this time,” said Guy; “and Keston and Miss Frobisher ran away that evening.

“I know that this doesn’t seem to have much to do with my ghost story; but I wanted to show you that Vernon had not much reason to feel kindly for Keston.

“The Kestons—for he married her at once—stayed abroad a year, and then for the first time he went not to the Manor House, but to a cottage not many miles from it.

“Mrs. Keston was unwell, and Keston went out hunting alone.

“Now it so happened, by one of those

strange coincidences which so often occur, that Vernon, was staying in the very parish of Keston, with his uncle, the rector of the parish; and that he was also out hunting; and that the hounds drew the very gorse close to Cranbury brook, where squire Keston had made his famous leap, forty years before.

“At dinner, in the evening, Vernon began an account of the day but, the very moment he mentioned this gorse, the rector interrupted him, and began the long story, which I have already told you, about the squire’s leap—life and death—and ghost; and he had hardly finished before the postman, the man who had seen the ghost, asked to see him.

“The rector was happy to cap his story by introducing the postman. The latter, when he came in, was so dazed, that he could not tell his story for some minutes. Then it seemed that that very morning, hearing that the hounds met at the gorse bushes, and

being forced on business to go in that direction, he had struck across a few fields, and had just reached Cranbury brook, when he heard the hounds coming towards him. They streamed over the hill with a breast high scent, and raced down towards the brook. Not a man was within a field of them; and one and all, they reined up their horses and turned away; but before the whole field came the squire's ghost, mounted on his old black mare, and cleared it at the very spot that he had cleared it at forty years before.

“Vernon listened to the old story, and, at its conclusion said, very quietly, ‘Well, at any rate, it was no ghost this time, but veritable flesh and blood—young Mr. Keston. Old Squire Keston’s heir was out this morning, and I saw him clear Cranbury brook with my own eyes.’”

The old postman rubbed his head.

“‘Th’ young squire !’ he said, at last.

‘ Couldst ’a been i’ Keston o’ the night o’ th’ ould squire’s death?’

“It was the very question that had occurred to Vernon, and to such good purpose that, improbable though it may seem, within a fortnight he managed to have Keston arrested for his uncle’s murder.

“I heard the case tried myself, when I was on circuit.

“Almost the only new fact which was brought out was that the rope which Mr. Keston had hung himself with was a new one! A new rope was a curious article in that house.

“But some curious facts were brought out about the prisoner.

“It seems that, on the evening after the squire’s death, Frobisher, the same fellow whose sister Keston afterwards married, was playing whist in his rooms at Paris, with Keston and two others. In the middle of

the game an old friend broke in upon them, and accused Keston of having bolted the evening before with a certain danseuse, and insisted on knowing where the girl was. He was certain that she had bolted with Keston, because he had ascertained that the latter had spent the previous evening away from his hotel. Keston flatly declined to give any information as to the girl's whereabouts, *implying* that he knew them himself; and the result was a duel—not resulting in a mishap however—as the principals were separated after one round, in which Keston had declined to return his adversary's fire. Now Keston's counsel argued that had he not really bolted with the girl, he would never have accepted a challenge on her account. But it was urged on the other side—and it seemed to me with great force—that had he been in England on the previous evening, and anxious to conceal the fact, he could hardly have adopted a surer mode than by risking his life in a cause

which implied that he had been actually in or near Paris; and, if this supposition was correct, the very fact of his having risked his life showed that he feared the very worst, if his having been in England came to be known.

“The jury acquitted the prisoner, and I don’t think that they could have done otherwise; for even if it had been proved that he had been with his uncle that evening, there was positively no proof that his uncle had been murdered.

“But they acquitted the prisoner the more readily because they didn’t seem to relish the manifest share which Vernon had had in getting up the case. But it struck me as a very singular story, because if he was not in England, then—”

CHAPTER XIII.

"IF you please, my lord," said Warleigh, touching his hat. "We're quite ready to begin—leastways, if as Lord Sturdith has not come, you think right to shoot the wood to-day?"

"To-day, Warleigh. Yes, we'll shoot it to-day. Mr. Guy's been spinning us such a long yarn that we've been longer than we ought to have been over our luncheon. Forward's the word. Forward!"

"Amen," said Sir Anthony, looking at his watch. "Half-past two, Guy; if I've no time

to wipe your eye on the ghost's seat, it is your fault, for your story."

"One moment, Tyler," said his lordship, "let's have Warleigh's orders,"—and these were the orders.

They were all to walk, for a hundred yards, down a drive that ran right through the wood. Then they would find two smaller paths branching out on either hand; one of these Lord Deymont was to take, the other Guy. Old Sir Anthony was to keep in the middle all the time. Warleigh placed the beaters, and then came on with the guns himself—he had old Hector with him, in a leash, and he was coming on, quickly.

"Well done, sir! well done, indeed!" as Sir Anthony rolled a rabbit over, as it was crossing the ride, forty yards in front of him, "he won't move till we come up. Down, Hector, down! Ready, gentlemen? That will be your path, Mr. Guy," he added, pointing with his whip to a little path on the

right. "Pheasant, sir, pheasant!" as a glorious old cock bird came crowing and chuckling over from the left. Guy happened to be a little in front of them. It was a hard, long shot, and he followed up the bird a moment before he pulled; and then, as the smoke cleared off, he saw the noble fellow coming down, and heard Warleigh saying, "Not so bad, Mr. Guy, not so bad; but you were a little behind him. Lord, how that bird will run!"

"Let's try and get him at once—here, Hector!" and Lord Deymont called to Warleigh to loose the dog.

"Ye'd better wait till we get up to him, my lord," remonstrated the keeper.

"No! no! try at once. Good dog, Hector!" and Hector bounded off, with his head up; he had marked right well the spot where the bird had fallen.

Now be it observed that Lord Deymont was utterly and entirely wrong to send a retriever into a new beat after a wounded bird;

but, then, Lord Deymont was one of those men, who, contrary to all duly orthodox belief, would rather have brought home one bird which had shown him a little sport than fifty which he had shot down like chickens in a corner. Moreover be it known that this nobleman's most heterodox idea of sport was "seeing dogs work," and I heard him say once that he'd rather walk through a turnip field with a couple of good setters without a gun than he would walk through the same field with the best beaters in Christendom, and with the best gun Westley Richards ever made.

I felt that it was necessary in these days of breechloaders and wholesale slaughter to apologize for the old earl. But to return to facts. Hector sprang off after the wounded bird, and dashed along the ride to the spot where they had seen it fall. They watched him follow it up at a somewhat steadier pace, and Warleigh began,

"Hector 'll have him, my lord ; look how the old dog works,—I never knew him lose a bird yet. Halloa ! what's the matter with the dog? Here, Hector ! Hector !"

And he might well call, for the dog had done his best to belie his reputation. He had stopped short,—stopped while he was hunting the bird, with his nose well down, thrown his head up in the air, howled as if he had been flogged, and darted down another ride to the left.

Warleigh called, whistled, scolded, cracked his whip,—but no Hector. Now, to those degenerate beings, who love like Lord Deymont to see their dogs work, nothing is so vexatious as an unruly dog ; and Lord Deymont, with something almost approaching, I am afraid, to an oath, seized the whip from his keeper's hand, and, bidding them all stay where they were, dashed off at his best pace,—and not a bad one too for sixty,—after the poor retriever.

They watched him, all but poor Warleigh, half amused at his earnestness; Warleigh, I suspect, would have gladly gone himself, and I believe would have liked to have shot Hector then and there for so disgracing his breed and his trainer.

They watched then the old lord jog on till he had reached the path down which the dog had turned,—they saw him raise his whip, and heard him shout “Hec—,” but the last syllable died away into a faint cry, and the poor old Earl fell forward on his face, and lay motionless on the cold, hard ground.

They hardly had time—Sir Anthony and Warleigh—to realise all this before Guy had sprung off and had got half way to the earl. They saw him rush on, and apparently begin to bend over his uncle’s body, and then, with a cry and a spring, dash down the path which Hector had taken.

Have you ever, in the midst of the daily routine of your life, or, in the commonest avo-

cations of business or pleasure, met death face to face? There are moments when we are so prepared for his coming that his visit is robbed of half its terrors ; there are others when it is so unexpected that it reads a more speaking lesson than the most eloquent sermon. Think of the strong man who goes forth in the morning to win his daily bread,—falls from a scaffold,—and before eventide is carried home a lifeless corpse. Think of the holiday-seeker who, with no other thought than pleasure, takes his seat in the excursion train, and dies, before an hour is over, the most fearful of all deaths. The weak woman at his side escapes, and all the reasoning power of the world cannot say why,—can give no better reason than the fulfilment of the old prophecy—“One shall be taken and the other left.”

If thou hast had acquaintance with such things as these. If thou has reasoned on them, then thou mayest understand the scene which the others when they came up

—half a minute later—had to witness;—Guy was bending down over the body of one, whom they all recognised at once. Despite the horrid, ghastly pallor that had settled on her lovely face,—despite the swoon which had driven the blood from her lips,—and despite the fearful traces of blood that were spattered here and there upon her, they would have been dullards indeed had they failed to recognise Marion Deymont. Not dead! Guy thanked God for that; for she breathed, and was warm,—nay, more, it was easy to see that it was not her blood that defiled her so foully.

No! no! it is his,—it is his. Look under that lock of hair which, clotted with blood, draggles heavily on his forehead; there is an ugly wound there which accounts for all this sorrow. Poor Sturdith! and is it all gone,—all?—is thy last sigh breathed, thy last word spoken?—are they all too late?—is there nothing left for them?—is this

youth ?—is this love ?—is this hope ?
Heaven! Heaven! was there no one weary
of this world that thou must seize upon him ?

That tableau, so sad, so still, so solemn,
let me try and paint it before I take you
away. One venerable oak, which century
after century had nurtured and increased,
flung its noble branches over the broad green-
sward on which this sad scene was being
played,—Guy was supporting his sister's
senseless form in his arms, and tenderly
smoothing her rough, frightened hair, and
wiping off, so far as he was able, the tell-tale
stains that were spattered upon her. Poor
girl! even in her swoon she held her lover's
hand,—his dying grip had stiffened round her
palm. It seemed as if even death was
powerless to separate them. Poor old War-
leigh was gazing with wonder and fear, bent
over the corpse, on the ghastly wound which
had caused Lord Sturdith's death. There was
a tear in the old man's eye,—and he was trying

to compose the features of him whom he had so loved to serve. For the agonies of a violent death, had left their print indelibly marked on the dead man's visage. Still Warleigh was not so unpractical as the rest,—he was thinking all the time how this had come to be.

Aye, how this had come to be? Who could have been so cruel as to murder love in his love's arms?—who could have been so cruel as to kill the bright, gay young lord?—*the* lord they all loved, *the* lord they all respected so dearly. Look at those poor rugged beaters, who have come up now and are standing round,—there is not one whose eye is not moist with tears—honest, honest tears; they may be weak, they may be womanly; never are they so holy as when they are wrung from a strong man's sorrow.

And all this time they left the poor old earl lying there. This was so much worse, that they even had no thought for him, and the poor old man lay there in a fit on his face,—

his gun which had dropped from his hands a few paces from him.

So still, so silent was it all, that a rabbit had crept from her covert, and was cropping her frugal meal within a foot of Lord Deymont's gun. Poor little thing, it had sense, or instinct—or whatever the right word is,—enough to see that these men were not compassing its death. And Hector;—no, Hector never noticed the little rabbit,—he was licking the dead, cold hand, perhaps wondering why there was no caress, no kind word in return.

Of that sad group, it was Guy who first broke silence,

“Who shall tell all this to my aunt and Clementina?”

Yes, in their grief they had to remember those who would grieve still more,—the mother, the sister,—wondering perhaps why Sturdith and Marion had not returned. Guy

looked towards Sir Anthony, but Sir Anthony's eye fell.

"I must go myself, I suppose," the brave fellow added.

It needed a braver heart, that errand, than to ride headlong into the cannon's mouth.

But before he went he leant over Warleigh.

"How could it have happened? None of our shot could have reached so far."

"No shot ever carried close enough to make that wound, Mr. Guy;" and then the old man touched his arm, and whispered more than said, "this is the ghost's seat, sir; and there's foul work been done this morning before many of us were up."

I really believe that Guy had been so occupied with his sister that he had fancied that some shot had found its way from their guns to this spot,—some fatal shot; but he shuddered as Warleigh said those words, and showed him the wound.

“Stay,” he cried; “if that’s the case let’s watch the wood. Set men round at once, Warleigh.”

Warleigh shook his head,—“The sun wasn’t two hours old, sir, when this was done;” and he showed how Sturdith’s arms, had stiffened in death.

“There may be traces, though; take care that the men do not walk about and unwittingly destroy them. I must go,” he sighed, “to my poor aunt. Sir Anthony,” he added, coming back again, “will you see to poor Lord Deymont, and have him and Marion carried to the house? Let me be a clear half hour before you to get my aunt and cousin away from it all. You run down to the village and tell Dr. Evans that he must come immediately. Tell no one what has happened. Warleigh, let another of the men get some water and wash poor Lord Sturdith’s face. Don’t bring his body to the house, it can do no

good; leave it for the present at one of the lodges."

He had given all these orders in as clear a tone of voice as if he had been giving his directions for the commonest act of common life, and he had turned to go. Think him not hard-hearted. I admire nothing more than the strength of mind that can even quell grief, but the effort had been too much for him, strong as he was, and he turned again,—“Oh, my God! oh, my God!” and flung himself into his senseless sister’s arms.

But it was but for a moment, and he only waited once again to stoop and loose his uncle’s kerchief, and then hurried on towards the house upon as sad a mission as ever a strong Christian was yet called upon to fulfil.

“There goes Sir Anthony,” said Warleigh, as he watched Guy’s hastily retiring figure, “the kindest heart in all the county next to him,”—

he pointed to Lord Sturdith's corpse; but even at such a moment, when the tears were running down the old fellow's cheeks, he could not help adding, "but he will never make much of a shot."

CHAPTER XIII.

IF you are tired with my story you had better put it down now. You'll find nothing more to interest you, for I shall introduce you to no one new. All that follows hangs on what is past; what is to come is but in explanation of that.

And if, perchance, you think it an interesting story, but spoilt by the telling of it, lay the book down now, and, when you happen to be alone out walking, or alone in the evening, make for yourself a sequel to the tale. Perhaps you may catch the murderer quicker than the police did, after all.

But if I have been so successful as to make the old lady who has a faint interest in the ghost's seat, or her pretty young niece, who has also a little interest in Guy and Clementina; or the said pretty niece's favourite partner, who perhaps has low taste enough to take an interest in Mary Powell,—if I have made any of these or anyone else wish to see how all this ends, then come along with me, for you won't get the true ending from anyone else.

But if you are not interested and yet go on, it's your own fault and not mine, so don't blame me for wasting your time.

I must take you back now to another scene in our history.

It was just two o'clock. Lady Deymont, Lady Tyler, Miss Tyler, and Clementina were sitting in the drawing-room at Deymont, working.

"Shall we say three for the pony carriage, Lady Tyler?" asked Lady Deymont.

"Yes, I should think that will do very nicely. We are all tired, and shall not want a long drive."

So Lady Clementina rang the bell, and Lady Deymont ordered the carriage at three; and then they all fell to work again.

"It certainly was a capital ball," suggested Lady Tyler, looking up after a pause.

"Yes," said Lady Clementina, for the remark was addressed to her, and she saw that she was expected to answer it; but then she blushed, for she remembered why she had thought it a capital ball, and so to seem at ease she added, "Didn't you think so, Constance?"

Poor Miss Tyler sighed, for she had not thought so; but she answered, very quickly, if not very truthfully, "Yes, it was a very good ball, indeed."

Then they all fell to work again—stitch, stitch, stitch. For you must know that though it is quite true that ladies chatter

much more than men—they talk but little when there is a good wide gap of years between their ages; their daughters' presence kept the mothers from talking; the mothers were there, and the daughters were silent.

Had Lady Deymont been alone with Lady Tyler, she would have rattled on a full baker's dozen to the hour. Had Miss Tyler and Lady Clementina been by themselves, they would have billed and cooed as two pretty, nice young girls can; but, as it was, the conversation came by fits and starts, as I have endeavoured to reproduce it.

"I wonder whether Sturdith and Marion have come home yet," Lady Clementina began at last.

"Oh, of course they have," said Lady Deymont, "long before this."

"They are much best left to themselves, and much happier," sympathised Lady Tyler.

"Oh, much," echoed her hostess. "I have

no doubt that they have gone out for a ride, or something of that sort."

"How very nice and pretty she is."

"Yes, she is very nice and pretty." Lady Deymont gave something very like a sigh. She had certainly had a wish that her son should make a little better match, and she let out her hopes and vanity too, by adding, "And, you know, after all Sturdith will have enough for both of them. We shall look to Clementina now to make *the* match."

Lady Clementina knew very well what her mother meant by *the* match. So she only coloured up to her eyes, and said, "Oh, mamma! How can you?" and then went on stitch, stitch, stitch with her knitting; but she dropped a stitch, and had to pick it up, and picking up a stitch is very hard work for the eyes, so hard work that Lady Clementina's eyes grew quite wet; but, then, it was some very fine knitting that she was working at.

And Constance knew very well what Lady

Deymont meant by *the* match, and somehow or other it made her turn very pale, but she only went on stitch, stitch, stitch, faster than ever,—so fast that she pricked her finger with her worsted needle. Have you ever pricked your finger? Yes, and you didn't cry. Well, at any rate, I am afraid that Miss Tyler's eyes were very moist indeed.

And Lady Deymont thought, perhaps, that she had said a little too much, for she went on stitch, stitch, stitch, and did not look up again. And so there was no help for it, but Lady Tyler went on stitch, stitch, stitch, as fast as any of them.

And they might have gone on,—I do not know for how long,—working like so many milliners, as all good ladies should, had not Lady Deymont looked up to rest her eyes—for old eyes will not last as young ones—and said,

“Constance, won't you play us something, dear?”

“ Oh, do, Constance,” chimed in Lady Clementina; “ or, no,—sing us that pretty song I heard you practising yesterday.”

“ I am in no voice, Clementina, to-day,”—but still she got up and sat down at the piano and sang the following song:—

Wander away, wander away,
From the scenes where my childhood loved joyous to play;
Wander away, wander away,—
For my own laddie calls me to come,
So sister and brother,
So father and mother,
I must e'en leave my old, happy home.

But whilst I'm away,
My thoughts shall oft stray,
From the joys that I have, to the pleasures gone! gone!
And then they will roam
To my old, happy home,
As I sit in my chamber, alone! alone!
As I sit in my chamber alone.
So 'tis wander away, &c., &c.,

And if in years after,
I too have a daughter,—
Whom I've loved to watch gambol and play,—
I'll try and discover,
For her a gay lover;
And bid them go wander away! away!
And bid them go wander away.
For 'tis wander away, &c., &c.

“ Thank you, Constance, thank you, Con-

stance," cried Lady Deymont and Clementina too ; for poor though the words be, they are set to a pretty tune, and Constance Tyler has a sweet voice , but, as she sprung up, she said,

"Now, Clementina, it is your turn ; so sit down,—I will fetch your music," and she laughingly caught up a portfolio.

Lady Clementina turned over some dozen songs, and then she put them all from her.

"No, I will give you a new song, and you shall tell me what you think of it. But you must admire it, though,—at least the words,—for Sturdith wrote them for me."

Peace ! whither, whither flittest thou away ?

Oh ! stay.

Though war may rage, and passion hold its sway,

One maiden's heart to thee shall pray,

And bid thee stay.

Stay, for in safety here thou mayest remain ;

Then stay.

Stay and resume thy happy, happy reign,

Nor bid me pray to thee again,

And pray in vain.

Stay, at my bidding, list to my request,

And stay,

From strife, from trouble far ! within my breast,

Beloved and loving,—blessing, blest,

For ever rest !

What, truant, wilt thou not accept my prayer?
Then go!
To happier realms, in joy, in hope, repair;
And for my wearied soul prepare
A refuge there!

The door opened while the last word still lingered on her voice; the door opened before they had time to thank her for her song, and Guy Deymont entered the room.

“Why, Guy,” they all exclaimed at once, “so soon tired!”—and Clementina looked down and blushed; perhaps it was natural that she should do so. “So soon tired,” went on Lady Deymont; “you had better come out with us. Why, how grave you are! Surely, nothing—” She gasped for breath. “Nothing can have happened?”

Guy had walked right up to where she was sitting, and his face was so grave that she might be well excused for the anxiety which her voice displayed. She had risen from her seat, and grasped Guy’s arm; but he had placed her softly back again,—all that he said was “my dear, dear aunt—”

"Guy, dear Guy, tell *me*?" passionately broke in Lady Clementina.

"You will know it all soon enough—it is bad, bad news."

"Oh, I know there has been some dreadful accident," said poor Lady Deymont, wringing her hands, "I am sure of it; some one has been shot. It may have been a beater,—say it was a beater?"

Guy only shook his head; he tried to speak, but the words stuck on the roof of his mouth—he could not;—he shook his head again.

"Oh, it is your uncle. Is he much hurt? tell me—speak. Pity, Guy, why don't you tell me?"

There was a tear in Guy's clear, blue eye as he answered,

"Dear, dear aunt, Uncle Deymont has not been hurt—no! no! Sir Anthony is quite well;" for Lady Tyler had started up. "There have been sad, sad doings."

"Why," almost shrieked her ladyship, "there was no one else out shooting! You are not hurt; Lord Deymont is not hurt;" and she gasped for breath.

Guy rather whispered, than uttered, the name of Sturdith.

She glanced at him, with her eyes bursting from their sockets, but free from tears. She laid her hand, her left hand, on his arm, and with her right she smoothed back the hair from her face. She almost looked a madwoman at that moment, and she shrieked—a wild hysterical laugh,

"Ha! ha! it cannot be. Sturdith did not go out shooting—no! no! it cannot be."

She stopped quite suddenly, and was as calm as she had been wild.

"Oh, heaven, it is! it is!"

She just raised her eyes to meet her nephew's. She saw no hope in the big tears that were rolling down his cheeks, and dropped fainting and unconscious into his arms.

Lady Clementina had not shed a tear. Either the blow had been so sudden that it had lost all its power, or else the grief was so heavy that there was no tear to relieve it—I know not ; but it was Lady Clementina who busied herself most about her poor mother. It was Lady Clementina who rang the bell for the servants. It was Lady Clementina who gave all the directions, and it was not till she was alone with Guy, that she put her arm round his.

“Dear, dear Guy, for heaven’s sake tell me how all this happened?”

“No, no, darling,” and he bent down and kissed her ; there was no warmth in her lips ; they were icy cold. “Not now ; some other time.”

“Oh, I had so much rather know it all. Who did it? and, Guy—”

“Well, dearest?”

“Have you thought of your sister?” She stopped, for she saw the tear in his eye.

“Yes, Clementina, poor Marion knew it first of all.”

“Then—then, she was out shooting with you?”

“No, no, pet, Sturdith wasn’t out shooting; we none of us know how it happened. You will know it all soon enough,” and he led her gently out of the room. “I have many things I must do, Clementina; you had better go and stay with my poor aunt—she will want you.”

It was thus that the lovers separated on that unhappy morning.

And in my judgment—though perhaps here my reader may differ from me—it was no slight merit in Lady Clementina that she consented to part thus. What reason was there, save her lover’s will, that she should not know what had befallen her brother? Surely she had a right to insist on knowing all;—yet she resisted not her lover’s unwillingness to tell her more; and with a

weary, sick heart,—a heart that was all the more weary, all the more sick, from the very doubt that weighed, oh, so heavily! upon it,—she went to busy herself in, hardest task of all, attempting to alleviate the griefs of others, who, though they could not feel more acutely, were less able to control their grief than herself.

Guy found that they had just brought his sister in, and taken her to her room. He went thither and found that her maid had been taking off her cloak, and hat, and had laid her on her bed. She was senseless still.

But they rubbed her lips with brandy, and bathed her forehead with Eau de Cologne, and she sighed at last.

Guy motioned to the maid to go. He was alone with his sister when she opened her eyes.

She looked round the room as if she was trying to recall her thoughts. She did not notice her brother at first, though he was

supporting her in his arms. But it was not many moments before her eyes rested on him, and then there was a low shudder all through her frame, and she whispered,

“Guy, Guy, where am I? What am I doing? Why am I here?”

He bent over her, and kissed her cold cheek; he had no other answer to give her.

“But Guy, why am I in bed now? It is late; I am sure it must be late; and where have I been?”

“You had better try and sleep, darling,” Guy managed to say.

“But, Guy, I seem to remember now; but I can’t understand it at all. Why, I got up quite early, before any of you were up. Who put me to bed again?”

She stopped, and again he bent over and kissed her; but he was shocked at the awful smile that flitted over her face. I say flitted; for it flitted away almost as it had come, and then, in its place, there came a steady fixed

gaze; and she shook her head wildly, and waved her hands, as if she was motioning something or other away from her.

“Yes! yes! Guy,” she whispered, “I begin to remember now. I was with Sturdith; he was showing me the ghost’s seat; he was telling me—”

The smile flitted away again into that weary stare; then a shudder went through her whole frame, and she covered her face with her hands, and fell back swooning again.

Again he rubbed those pale lips with brandy; he smoothed her hair, too, while she lay in that swoon. She sighed, at last, and then she opened her eyes, and murmured, almost in a whisper,

“No, Sturdith, I never knew what it was to be afraid—at least—” and here she drew a very, very deep sigh—“at least, not for myself.”

Guy kissed his sister once again. That

kiss seemed to recall her wandering memory. Yet she lay as still on his arm—so still that he fairly trembled at that most unnatural quiet.

“Guy,” she whispered, “I remember it all now. Tell me; where is he? Is he dead?”

He could not answer that quiet whisper; but she answered it for herself.

“Oh! then he is, or you would have told me; Guy, dear Guy, who did it?”

“I do not know, darling. Come, you must not tire yourself now, we shall all find it out at last.”

“No! no!” and she started up in her bed. “I will not be put off in that way. Some one must have been in the wood—must have been waiting for us. Oh, and he was just kissing me; I heard the shot, and then I felt the warm blood. Oh, heaven!” and she sank back in hysterics on the bed.

Poor girl! Her happy dream had met with a rude waking, indeed. It had come, a joy-

ous ray, and had vanished—aye, as quickly as sunshine is clouded over on an April day! Poor Marion! her sobs wrung her brother's heart. He had thought her, only that morning, so happy; had envied her good fortune, and Sturdith's too. And now, as he heard her heartrending sobs, and thought on the pale blood-stained corpse, which was all that was left of her lover, he thanked God for His mercy to himself.

What if he dared not ask Clementina to be his wife? It was better than this; but, hist! for she spoke again in a whisper, weakened with her sobbing,

“Guy, Guy, do tell me who did it?”

“Dear Marion, on my honour I do not know, pet. On my honour I would tell you if I did. Lie down, dearest; try and be quiet, my own darling, for my sake; you will break my heart if you don't.”

She did lie down then, quite quietly, and he sat down with his hand in hers by the side of

her bed. His thoughts were bent on finding some answer to that question she had asked him; what, was even she ignorant? Could she give no clue to him who had fired the fatal shot? Had the assassin then lurked so closely?—yet worked so surely? Oh, there was a God above, and to him he prayed for help.

And his sister slept. She dropped exhausted into a calm, quiet sleep, and then he left her. At the door he found her maid waiting for his summons to return to Miss Deymont's side, and he sent her back to take his place; and then he went himself to enquire after his poor uncle.

The servants told him that the doctor was in with the earl. The earl had not been conscious since he had been carried in. My lady had gone to bed; she was going on dreadful. Lady Clementina, God bless her, was nursing her ladyship. They had not brought Lord Sturdith's body up to the house;

they hoped that they had done right. They had left it at the inn, till after the inquest was over.

Just at that moment, while Guy was talking to the servants in the hall, Lawless rushed in, hot and excited,

“Good God, Guy, why what has happened? Are you all dumb, and will not tell me? Has there been any accident, or what? What could have happened? Can none of you tell a fellow?”

Guy led him gently on one side.

“There’s ill news, Lawless, ill news for us all. Sturdith has been shot—I fear murdered.”

Lawless, strong man as he was, started visibly, and turned pale as the awful word “murder” fell upon his ears; but he answered, after a moment’s pause,

“You mean shot, Deymont,—you cannot mean murdered. No one—who would have murdered Sturdith?”

Guy shook his head again.

“I wish to heaven you were right, Lawless; but Sturdith was murdered in Hilton Wood, this morning, before any of us were up.”

CHAPTER XIV.

Two more days had passed; the winter had set in more severely than ever. It was a hard black frost; such a morning as Turner painted—in my judgment—the very best of all the works which he bequeathed to the nation. The poor little birds had almost forgotten their habits, and were hopping round the cottage doors in the hope of discovering some stray crumb to relieve their hunger. Here and there some kind-hearted housewife had scattered them a goodly meal, saved from the cloth on which she and her husband had breakfasted.

On this identical morning the little village of Deymont was in an unusual state of excitement. The one inn—dignified with the appellation of the Deymont Arms—was doing a right good business. The six stalls in the little stable had been occupied since the earliest dawn of day—a cow-shed had since then done duty as a stable; and the help of two neighbouring farmers had been obtained later on in the day, and they had managed between them to put up the rest of the horses.

In the tap-room of the inn there was a small assemblage of some dozen persons---chiefly farmers, tenants of Lord Deymont. They were sitting—some smoking, some drinking their brandy-and-water—debating all on the one subject, in which they all were interested—Lord Sturdith's murder.

But anxious as they all were—and eager in their arguments, there was a feeling in one and all that made them speak in a low, hushed tone ; and though they were discussing the

evidence which it was surmised would be forthcoming—and though there were nearly as many theories started as there were persons present, the grief that they all felt, made them speak low.

“I knew ’twould end in no good; the man who’d shoot a pheasant would shoot a Christian.”

It was Warleigh who spoke, and a young farmer, dressed in a velvet coat, answered him.

“May be, Mister Warleigh; may be the case with these wandering gipsy folks, who never were none of them up to good. But that every young fellow, who for a spree shoots a pheasant, would shoot a Christian, ’taint in reason, Mister Warleigh.”

“I don’t see that, Master Howell,” replied Warleigh. “None of your new fangled ideas for me. When I was a young ’un, we looked on a pheasant as a man’s own, just as much as his house; and those who attack a man’s

house don't stick at murder, so why should they who shoot a man's pheasant?"

The argument was illogical, but many less logical arguments have gone down before now, and there was a buzz of assent round the room.

"What think ye made him shoot the young lord?" asked, after a pause, an old grey headed farmer.

"There aint a shadow of a doubt about it, Mister Ryfel. Many's the day he's been waiting his chance, skulking about the woods. I've a seen him more than once myself, so there can't be a shadow of a doubt about it."

"What, a seen him yourself?"

"A dozen times, and better. What had he a ball for in his gun at all, were't not for young lord. Ye don't shoot pheasants with ball."

"No! and that's true enough."

"He was a rare fine young chap too, had he been steady."

“Steady,” said Warleigh, “’taint in the natur o’ those prowling varmint gipsies to be steady. They’re the curse of every place they settle in; — em, they never settle, and that’s the worst of it.”

“He was a right down good ’un too, the young lord.” It was the old farmer who spoke, and there was silence for a few moments. Silence, during which every one seemed afraid to speak, and then the same young farmer,—he of the velveteen coat,—said. “There weren’t a straighter goer in all the hunt.”

“Nor a better shot either,” continued Warleigh.

“Nor a kinder heart.” It was a very thin feeble voice,—very different to the loud, “aye, and that’s true enough,” that the sentence elicited. It was a very thin feeble voice; and the old man who spoke spread his hands on the table and, leaned forward.

“’Twere only last year, when the brown

mare ran away with my grandson,—minds't it, mates?—and the lad was thrown out hard by the toll-bar in Holly Lane. The young lord was driving that way and found the poor boy, and brought him home himself." The old fellow wiped a tear from his eye. "But that warn't all. My poor boy was in bed for six weeks and more, and not a day passed but the young lord came in to see about him. He wasn't much of a scholar, the poor lad, for you know, mates, he'd his bread and butter to get like the rest of us. But 'twas beautiful to hear the young lord teaching him. Such learning! Why, when the lad got well he could read me a chapter in the bible all except the long words and the hard names, which of course 't isn't for us to understand."

"And I remember," said a rough country fellow, "when Seth Raitt's son 'listed two years ago, come Easter, old Seth going to the young lord. Bless his heart for it, he

promised th' ould man he'd have him out, and he bought him out within three weeks, bless him."

Again there was a pause, and for full three minutes those honest country folks kept it unbroken. It was the young sporting farmer who again spoke first.

"Hast heard ought about Miss Deymont?"

He looked towards Digweed, who had been sitting in a corner of the room, smoking quietly. Upon being questioned, he took his pipe from his mouth, and, looking round the room, began. "Miss Deymont, bless her, she'd a' been a real good wife to the young lord, and a real good friend to us all. I may say so!" he continued, "for I were the last who ever saw him and her together." He drew his sleeve across his face. "I went home to my old 'oman, and said to her 'Martha,' said I, 'there's not another lady in the whole world so fit for my young lord, as Miss Deymont.' Don't talk to me!" he

added, turning round to his audience, "I've been to Lunnon in my time, and ought to know what a lady is. There's something in Miss Deymont," he waved his pipe deprecatingly, "that says as plain as I could speak it—'I'm a deal too good for all you country folks,' and then she smiles, or takes your hand, and seems to say," and here the old man again drew his sleeve across his face. "'But I've forgotten it all, and come to live nigh thee and love thee for the sake of my dear lord here.'"

No one spoke, and Digweed took two or three pulls at his pipe before he continued. "I never saw my young lord look so happy as the morning—well, the last morning I saw him. His last moments were happy enough, poor lad. Bless heaven for that."

Once again there was a pause in the conversation, and then an old farmer asked. "Hast heard ought of Lord Deymont, to-day?"

Warleigh shook his head. "He'll ne'er be the same man again! I've heard say that his face is so shrivelled that his best friend wouldn't know him; and ne'er a word has he uttered since they carried him in from Hilton wood, that morning."

I have tried to reproduce the conversation of those poor country folk, in the little tap-room of the Deymont Arms that morning, and I have done so because I should very much regret if anyone were to read this work, and fancy from what I say, or from what I do not say, that Lord Deymont's poor neighbours heard with indifference of his son's death.

Outside, where there was a much larger assembly of labourers, woodmen, and artisans, there was the same quiet conversation and the same quiet sorrow, in a still more remarkable degree. You may tell me that the people of England are not conservative;—I say there is no such good conservative

as the labourer of England. He knows the squire—he loves the squire—he is proud of the squire; he does not want any new rights, he knows, for experience has taught him, that, if there is a bad year or a bad winter, the squire will not let him starve, and so he doffs his hat, and prays a blessing on his squire's head—aye, though Mr. Bright himself bid him not.

It was seldom, if ever, that Deymont had seen such an assembly as there was outside the Deymont Arms that morning. The frost was so hard that most of the cottagers were out of work, and so had full leisure to stand idly at the inn door. Then the strangers who had driven in that morning had mostly brought a servant, to look after their horses—and these too had joined the crowd. There was an irresistible impulse that had led thither young and old. The very children, on their way to school, instead of putting down their satchels and indulging

themselves for the last five minutes in a slide on that tempting pond, walked demurely up and looked inquisitively into the face of some grown-up friend, to try and find out what *he* thought of it.

But it is in a room in the inn itself that my story rests.

Twelve honest English yeomen are sitting there, summoned in the Queen's name to try and determine how Henry, Lord Sturdith, had come by his death. Twelve honest English yeomen! They had viewed the body, and now were sitting in solemn conclave to hear the evidence that was to be laid before them.

They had a shrewd clever man above them in the coroner, a man who was not likely to miss a telling point, or to overlook any suspicious discrepancy; and there was a great lawyer, specially engaged for Lord Deymont, to labour and to search, that justice might not fail.

The first witness called was our old friend, Guy Deymont. He was cousin (I insert his evidence much as it was given in the papers) to the late Lord Sturdith; had known him from his earliest years; was at Eton with him; had last seen him alive the night before his death. He had been with him to a ball at Hicklebury—he had seemed in good spirits that evening—and had heard him, when he went to bed, ask his (Guy's) sister to meet him before breakfast. His sister was engaged to Lord Sturdith. Had not paid much attention to their both being absent from breakfast. Had not been surprised that Lord Sturdith had not joined them out shooting. Did not see anything to wonder at in that. They had been shooting for about two hours—Guy turned very pale here, and the jury bent forward to listen—before anything occurred. He had wounded a pheasant, and the keeper had loosed the retriever, but the dog had left the bird's track, and had taken another path;

Lord Deymont had run after the dog, and, when he had reached the path down which the dog had gone, had fallen down in a fit; Lord Deymont was still very ill, his left side paralysed. When the rest of them got up, they saw his (Guy's) sister lying senseless on Lord Sturdith's body—yes, Lord Sturdith was quite cold. There was no mark of a struggle near. There was some thick covert just opposite, quite thick enough to hide a man. Thought that the shot must have come from that direction. Was quite sure that it could not have come from any of their party out shooting. It was a bullet wound. Game was never shot with bullets. Yes, deer were shot with bullets. Deer were game. Should not, strictly speaking, have used the word game; but they were not shooting deer. Any one could tell the difference between a shot wound and a bullet wound. Lord Sturdith's death had most certainly been caused by a bullet. [This long digression

was in reply to a series of questions put by an unusually silly juror.] Had had the ground examined near the covert which he had mentioned. Had found a trace of a shoe on some unmelted snow. Had had the trace carefully copied by the village shoemaker. He submitted that they had better examine the shoemaker on that subject. No, nothing else had been found there. Was quite sure that no firearms had been found near the place. Was quite convinced in his own mind—(This was objected to; a witness had no right to have a mind)—that Lord Sturdith had not met his death at his own hands. Had always believed that his uncle was very popular with his tenants. Had never heard of Lord Sturdith having any enemies. Yes, it was possible that he might have had enemies; if so, he (Guy) had never heard of them. His sister was far too ill to leave her bed—her deposition had been handed in.

Guy gave his evidence in a clear low voice.

He was dressed in deep mourning, and was far paler than when we saw him last. More than once he had to stop and take time before he could complete a sentence or some reference to his poor sister. But it was over now, and he heaved a sigh as he turned away, glad that his portion of the duties of the day was completed.

Dr. Evans, the village surgeon, was the next witness called. He was a strange, pompous little man; he might possibly have been five feet six in height *in* his boots; but then you could say of him, as the wit said of the shilling to the cabman, that it was as broad as it was long. I only saw the pompous little doctor once in my life—and that once was long after the date of this inquest. He was tumbling after his cocked hat, in full uniform—for he was Honorary Surgeon to the Hicklebury Volunteers—into a close cab, to attend Her Majesty's levée.

The little doctor looked upon the present as an epoch in his life. I believe that he half regarded Lord Sturdith's murder as a special interposition of Providence in his behalf. To be summoned as a witness on the great murder case of the day—this was better than helping babies into the little world of Deymont, or even than seeing some poor fellow out. Why there would be a report of the case in the "Times." His, his own name would appear—Dr. Evans, Lord Deymont's medical attendant! He wrote it out, all in full; he was determined that his evidence should be full enough too.

And he began a long history, perpetually interrupted by the coroner, but always reverting to the old tale—how he had been called in to Lord Sturdith, when his lordship had the croup. How he had given him a hot bath and had cured him. How he had attended him when he had come home from Eton with the measles; how he was con-

vinced that his lordship's constitution was a good one. The jury yawned and looked at each other. What had measles and croup to do with Lord Sturdith's murder? But Dr. Evans was not a person to be put down, and so he went on his own way.

"I was attending, sir, a poor patient," so Dr. Evans went on, "when Lord Deymont's servant came to fetch me. I made what haste I could, and went up to the house. I did not see Lord Sturdith then; his body had been brought straight down here from Hilton wood. When I saw him, he was quite dead; I should say that he had been dead for some hours. I have made a *post mortem* examination of Lord Sturdith's remains. There is a slight accumulation of blood at the heart—a fatty tendency—wholly insufficient, however, to account for death. The liver was in a healthy condition; the lungs were remarkably free from disease. I did not find in my whole examination anything sufficient to account for death."

Here one of the jurors, a shrewd farmer, interposed. "Was it necessary," he asked, "to have made so rigid an examination, when there was a wound on Lord Sturdith's head which appeared, speaking of course as an unprofessional man, to have been amply sufficient to account for his lordship's death?"

"Sir," said the little doctor; and the slight buzz of assent that had followed the juror's remarks, subsided instantly, "I conceived it to be my duty, in a matter of such importance as this, to omit no means which might enable me to discover the true cause of Lord Sturdith's death. The wound *might* have been made after death. There *might* have been other causes which would have caused death at that same moment, had the wound never have been given." The little doctor here looked round in an enquiring way, as if he was saying to himself, 'they won't dare interrupt me again.' "I say 'might,' sir; for I am bound to confess that I

could not trace the existence of any such cause. Sir, I then conceived it to be my duty, to examine the wound in Lord Sturdith's head." Then the little doctor proceeded to examine the wound; how the ball had entered into one part of the brain, and how it had passed through the other. How it had been deflected by one bone, and stopped by another. Then he produced the ball itself.

"And are you of opinion?" said the coroner, at length, "that this wound was sufficient to cause death?"

"Yes, sir," was the little doctor's reply; and he folded his arms, as he smiled complacently on the jury, "I am of opinion that death must have resulted instantaneously from such a wound."

There was a slight pause, during which the juror, who had interrupted before, might have been heard to whisper that he could not yet for the life of him see why poor

Lord Sturdith's body had been opened. But they had got at Doctor Evans' evidence at last; they had found out all they wanted from him; he could make way now for other witnesses.

And then they handed in poor Miss Deymont's deposition. She told it, all that you know already, only much more beautifully than I have told it. Her meeting Lord Sturdith that morning; the quiet of the sleeping house; her casual meeting with Digweed, and Digweed's mention of Jim, the gipsy. Nay, she had made them write down, for she remembered it word for word, her fears about that same gipsy, and Sturdith's laughing rejoinder.

The jury listened more intently than they had before, for the evidence now was in support of the suspicions which they had already formed.

Then she had gone on to say that they had walked into Hilton Wood; that he had

been pointing out to her the mossy bank which tradition connected with the old family murder; when she had heard the sharp crack of a rifle, and had started round to see who it was who could be shooting so near them, when she saw Lord Sturdith stagger and fall, just babbling out her name. She remembered nothing more—nothing, till she had awoke to a knowledge of her misery, in her own room, with her brother beside her.

The gardener, Digweed, was the next witness. I need not dwell long on his evidence, important though it was. He had happened to be walking across Hilton Wood on the morning of Lord Sturdith's murder—it was his nearest way from the farm, and he had been down there about some manure—when he saw Jim the gipsy. There was a thoroughfare through part of the wood; but, when he first saw him, Jim was not in the thoroughfare, though he had made to it at once, at his (Digweed's) approach. Digweed confessed

that he had used some hard language; had called Jim an idle, thieving scamp, or some such name; had advised him to go straight home, for Warleigh would be sure to be about there. Why had he abused him?—He hated the fellow; he would not conceal it from his honour—of course he hated him; had not the scamp said that he would pay his lordship out?

Then this drew out a long series of questions; and the coroner elicited how Jim had, months ago, when he was put in prison by Lord Deymont for poaching, threatened that he would be even with his lordship; that he would pay him out; that they would see one day who would suffer most from his imprisonment. The faces of the jury grew longer. Link after link was being added to the chain of evidence against the gipsy.

Then Digweed spoke of his meeting with Lord Sturdith and Miss Deymont, in the

flower-garden, and the poor fellow's eyes filled with hard honest tears, as he was led on to talk about them. He had not feared for them; he never dreamed that Jim had not left the wood. Had it been otherwise, he would have advised Lord Sturdith not to go there. He did not mean to say that he would have feared what had happened; but he would have been afraid that the gipsy would have been rude to his lordship.

Warleigh was the next witness called. He spoke to the finding of the body; he corroborated Digweed's evidence in regard to the threats which the gipsy had more than once sworn against the Deymont family. So far, he only bore out what had been said before. But in the afternoon, after the murder had been found out, he had been engaged with the constable of the parish in making a minute search in Hilton Wood. They had both come to the conclusion that the fatal shot had been fired from a thick covert,

nearly opposite to the ghost's seat. Close by this shady, sequestered covert, a little snow had still resisted the slight thaw, and on this snow they had found the trace of a man's boot. The village cobbler had made a careful measure of the trace, which had one peculiarity in it, that the sole which had made the print must have been worn into a hole in the centre.

The cobbler was called; he was quite satisfied of this. He could swear to the boot that had made the trace, were it shown to him.

Then they called the parish constable, and he corroborated the latter part of Digweed's evidence. He had communicated with the Hicklebury police; and they were all agreed that the suspicion was so strong, that they were justified in arresting the gipsy on a charge of murder. They knew what a desperate fellow he was, and so they had gone in such force as to make resistance impossible—and, at the dead of the night, when he was asleep, and less

prepared; still he had flung one of them to the other end of the room, before he had been taken. They had found him at a little inn, the "Swan," about six miles off; he was always there—he was in love with the host's daughter. Then they had searched the room; they had found a gun—it was clean; a powder flask, a shot pouch, and some loose bullets—they were produced; they were indisputably the same size as that with which Lord Sturdith had been shot. They had found no boots in the room, except one pair; neither of that pair was worn in the sole; but the cobbler deposed, for they recalled him, that the boot which had made the print on the snow was as nearly as possible the same size as that which had been found in the gipsy's room.

And the police had hunted out one witness more; Ned Raggles the helper at the "Swan," and no friend of Jim's, as he blurted out in his ignorant way,—Jim had quarrelled with him,

about six months ago, for refusing to give some strolling gipsies some beer, and had thrashed him so that he had been forced to lie up for a fortnight. But his evidence was given in a straightforward manner. He perfectly recollected Jim's coming in that morning. He had his gun with him, and he went straight up to his room with it; but he (witness) could swear that the gun was *not* clean at that time, for he had noticed an exploded cap on one of the nipples. They cross-examined him on this point; but he was quite firm about it—nothing shook him in the least. The gun had been clean enough the night before, for he had seen it in Jim's room; but it was dirty then. He would swear in any court in the world that there was an exploded cap on one of the nipples.

And then the coroner called Jim himself, and briefly explaining to him how suspicion had fixed itself upon him, asked him whether he wished to make any statement, warning

him, however, that any evidence which he gave would be taken down, and might perhaps be produced against him on some other day.

The gipsy stood there with a sneer on his proud lip, though every now and then you might see his eye glance anxiously from one to another of the jurors as if he was trying to read his fate in the expression of their faces. He stood there far the finest and handsomest man in all that room.

“Yes, sir, I will say my say, though ye won’t believe me. Shame on ye all the more for your lopsided justice! Ye’ll send me to prison—yes, to rot and wither with no sight of the bright sun, and no taste of the fresh air; but I didn’t kill Lord Sturdith. There never was a speck of man’s blood on this hand yet; but ye’ll send me to prison, for ye are glad to shut me up and save your game.”

Here the coroner interrupted him, and pointed out to him how useless it was vent-

ing his spleen so foolishly ; and he questioned him about the morning of the murder,—led him to speak of his meeting with Digweed.

“I’ve told your honour,” the gipsy said, and perhaps the calm manner of the coroner had had its effect upon him, for he spoke more quietly ; “I have told your honour that there never was a speck of blood on this hand, and I spoke truly. ’Taint o’ much use for such as me to say so, though, for ye’ll believe the liars, who have spoken to ye, before ye believe a word of a poor homeless lad. I don’t deny that I was in Hilton Wood that morning. Mister Digweed, he saw me. ’Tisn’t likely I should deny it. Nor be I going to deny, your honour, that I went for game—poaching ye call it. But, your honour, there’s a mighty difference between killing game and killing men. When I saw Digweed, I leaned my gun against a tree, and went to meet him. When I went back, the young lord was dead—I saw him, your honour, dead ! I took

my gun away and struck across the fields towards the Swan. And ye won't believe me," he added, looking straight towards the coroner's face. " You won't believe me, your honour, because I've broken your laws and shot the wild creatures that God gave us all; and you'll believe the others who've spoken against me. Dost know, your honour, why they have? Months ago, I was put in prison for doing what ye call poaching. It was a bright clear day, and I felt the free air that I was not to feel again for six weary months; and I felt mad, your honour, and said more than I should have done against Lord Deymont. Your honour, are a poor mad lad's words to weigh against him so heavily? When I came out of prison there were some games in Deymont Park, and there was a reason in those games for what some of those, who have spoken this afternoon have said against me." He stopped, and looked down on the ground for a few minutes; and

apparently, for he seemed about to rise from his seat, the coroner thought that he had finished. But Jim again looked up and said, though with barely so firm a voice, "I have told your honour why those who have spoken against me, hate me. It wouldn't be hard to add another reason; but I'll tell you why 't isn't true what they have said: I don't deny that I saw Lord Sturdith and Miss Deymont walking together. But that I'd have hurt him then! There's a lass, your honour, who has saved me from more than one scrape; if I had taken her advice I shouldn't a been i' this scrape now; and, when I saw those two walking in Hilton Wood, I thought of Mary, and how I walked with her, and I'd not have harmed—ye won't believe me, none of ye—a hair of either of them; and, when I came back and saw her lying on him, I could not help thinking of what would become of my poor lassie were anything to happen to me."

"Then it was with your gun, you believe," said the coroner, descending, if I may say so, from poetry to prose, "that Lord Sturdith was murdered?"

"I am certain of it."

"How came it that you had loaded with ball at all?"

"I always load one barrel with ball. I've taken more than one buck out of Deymont Park, and a fat doe is better pay than a cart load of pheasants, and less trouble."

"But, my poor fellow," and the coroner spoke kindly, for he had been touched by Jim's story, "the account you have given of yourself may be all true; but it isn't very credible. You state positively that it was with your gun that Lord Sturdith was shot; you confess that you were on the spot yourself directly after the murder, and there is no evidence to prove that anyone—indeed, it may be very fairly presumed that no one else could

have been there without your knowledge. It would have been better for you to have taken my advice, and to have refrained from saying anything."

"Your honour, is't for a poor lad like me to say that another was in the wood that morning? 'Twouldn't help me, for ye'd ne'er believe my words, and so I'm not going to do another harm without helping myself. Two days ago I knew that I'd be in prison to-day, and I know now that 'twill be five years, five long years afore I come back to these parts and see Mary again; and when I come back, as come back I shall, ye'll be all sorry that ye did me harm to-day; and right glad—one and all of you—to see me happy with my own Mary!" He paused for a moment, and then, laying his brawny hand on the table, added, in a clear firm voice, "'Tis all as plain to me, your honour, as plain as the lines on my hand."

I am not sure that his crazy ending did not do more harm than his address had done good to his cause.

I have given as it seems to me the gist of the evidence at the inquest on Lord Sturdith. There were other witnesses, but these were only called in corroboration of what I have already told you. When it was all over, the coroner made a brief charge to the jury. They were summoned, he told them, to inquire into the causes of the death of a man, whose body had been found in Hilton Wood. It had been proved to them that the dead man was Lord Sturdith; and that his death had resulted from a bullet wound. It had been shewn to them that it was almost impossible that that wound had been self-inflicted. The evidence all tended to prove that the shot had been fired by a gun, the property of a gipsy, who acknowledged having taken the gun into Hilton Wood that morning. It appeared probable that it had been fired from a spot

where a foot-print had been found. It was clear that this print had not been made by the boots the gipsy was known to have. On the other hand, as it was made by a boot of apparently exactly the same size as those which the gipsy wore, it was possible that he might have concealed the boots in which the murder had been committed. Then, for a motive, it had been proved that he had used threatening language, not in particular against poor Lord Sturdith, but generally against Lord Deymont's family. This was the case against the gipsy. For him there was his own account of his having left the gun, corroborated by Digweed's evidence, and the doubtful point of the print on the snow. They had themselves heard the gipsy give his evidence. They would therefore be the best judges what sort of credence they should yield to him. If they believed him, they would return a verdict to the effect that they had not discovered by whom the fatal shot had

been fired ; but if they did not believe his story, and, if they thought it was no accidental shot that had caused Lord Sturdith's death, they would record a verdict of murder against the gipsy.

Need I say what was the verdict which the jury returned?—

“ We find that the deceased, Henry Lord Sturdith, came by his death in consequence of a bullet, deliberately and wilfully fired, by James Alex, commonly called Jim the Gipsy.”

CHAPTER XV.

It was on the morning of the very day that the coroner's jury assembled at Deymont, that two gentlemen, to whom I have already introduced you, were sitting in the Guard's club in Pall Mall. I have said "sitting," but I am afraid I have selected a wrong word, for Lord Penzance was lolling on a couch, and his friend, Peyton, was lazily tapping the barometer, anxious to see what chance there was of an open day at last.

They had returned to London, for it happened that Peyton was on guard the morning after the Hicklebury ball. Lord Penzance had

strongly objected to doing so (but it was part of his nature to object to everything), because the thaw had set in so rapidly—as I hinted in a previous chapter,—on the morning after the ball, that it seemed not unlikely that the hounds would be able to meet in another day. But Penzance forgot that our English climate is as fickle as a woman. The thaw had but lasted for a few short hours. Steadily ever since, the thermometer had fallen, and 16 degrees of frost the night before, did not look much like hunting.

It was Peyton who spoke first.

“Heigh ho ! Penzance,” he yawned, as he turned away, “no chance yet of any hunting. Hang the frost, I hate skating. Three horses eating their heads off. It is enough to make a saint swear.”

“It can’t last for ever, Peyton ; so I don’t think that I shall stay up in this infernal hole. I have a great mind to go out of town at once. I am quite sick of all this.”

“Why you can do nothing out of town this weather. It is too cold to shoot with any comfort.”

“Hasn’t Lawless some duck shooting at Sturdith? I’ve a great mind to go down there.”

“Yes; but then he’s probably still at Deymont. So that cock won’t fight,” and Peyton took up the “Post,” and flinging himself on a chair began leisurely to read it.

“Phew!” he whistled in a few minutes. “Good Heavens, Penzance, have you seen this?”

“Seen what?” was the answer.

“Why Sturdith’s been murdered.”

“Murdered? What? Who shot him? Where is the paper?”

“Here it is, and not much either—

“We regret to state that Lord Sturdith was found in a copse, yesterday afternoon, a short distance from Deymont, murdered. The

coroner's inquest, it is believed, will take place to-day; but in the meanwhile the police are actively engaged in searching for the murderer. They believe him to be a notorious poacher, who is known to have used most threatening language towards Lord Deymont's family.'

"Then here's another paragraph—

"'By Lord Sturdith's death a vacancy of course arises for ——shire. Out of respect to Lord Deymont, not much discussion as to the probable candidate has at present arisen; but the names of Mr. Guy Deymont and Captain Lawless have both been mentioned in the conservative interest, and Mr. Abraham Muchmull, a rich millowner, of Hicklebury, intends, it is rumoured, to contest the county on advanced liberal principles.'"

The two friends were silent for a moment; but Lord Penzance broke out at last,

“Why, Peyton!”

“Well!”

“Egad! I’ve won the century.”

Peyton either didn’t remember, or didn’t choose to remember his bet at such a moment. For he answered,

“Won what, Penzance?”

“Why the century to be sure. If Sturdith is dead he cannot marry Guy Deymont’s handsome sister. So you lose your bet; and I win my money. It’s an ill-wind that blows no one any good.”

Peyton was an honest fellow at heart, and perhaps he disapproved of such cold-blooded philosophy, for he made no answer; and the conversation ceased for some minutes; but Penzance began again.

“I’ve half a mind to go down to this said inquest.”

“Why, what on earth should you be going down there for?”

“That’s more than I can tell you, myself;

but I am bored with London, and want to get out of it. Lawless is sure to go back to Sturdith now, so that I can easily get put up."

"Well, for my part I prefer the club," and Peyton shrugged his shoulders. "Telegraph for me, there's a good fellow, as soon as there's a prospect of beginning; but till then—well—good-bye, old fellow. You've got a hundred out of me this time. You must give me your revenge when you get back to London."

And so the two friends parted.

Penzance did go down to Deymont.

Not many hours after his conversation with his friend in the Guards' club, he got out of the train at the great station at Hicklebury, and set off on foot to walk across the downs to Deymont.

Had anyone asked his lordship then what had brought him down on this wild gorse chase, he would have been unable to have

answered them. There was a wild impulse about the fellow, which was the best part of him. He was bored with London,—anything was better than that,—so he had started off at once, leaving word for his servant to follow him with his luggage.

The keen, clear air as it came whistling over the downs would have lightened the heart of the veriest cynic. Even Lord Penzance—and that is saying a good deal—enjoyed his walk that morning. He did not know the country well; but still he knew it quite well enough to enable him to pick his way along, as he trudged onwards, happier than he had been for many, many, a day,—even seduced into humming a tune.

And so he went on over the downs. It was some four miles to Deymont,* and he had

* The attentive reader, who remembers the two hours' drive to the Hicklebury ball, may imagine this to be an error. But Deymont house is a mile and a half further than the village from Hicklebury; while on the other hand the ball-room at Hicklebury is farther from Deymont than the station.

The cut across the downs from Hicklebury to Deymont is three miles shorter than the carriage road.

gone a good three, when he struck into the path—those who know Deymont must remember it—which trends along by the little rippling stream that gurgles through the village. He was just emerging from the wood which you pass through—just passing the famous spot where old Sir Philip Harkaway had sent his horse at the ox-fence, and, leaving the field behind him on the wrong side, had had the hounds to himself for the first forty-five minutes of the best run of the season. Lord Penzance knew the spot well—he had often ridden up to it since, and looked at the famous old squire's leap. He had just passed this spot, I say, and had reached the open field above the church, when, at the opposite side of the field, he saw the first living thing, except a lark or so, and some partridges, that his eye had rested on since he had left Hicklebury.

She, for it was a girl, was leaning on the stile at the other end of the field; her back

was towards him, for she was looking towards the village. But as he came nearer he saw peeping beneath her plain cotton dress as choice an angle as was ever framed to tempt man; and, when he came a little nearer still, he saw rich locks of the lightest auburn, peeping from under the huge gipsy bonnet the girl was wearing.

So intent was she watching, or, at least, looking towards the village, that it was not until he actually stood beside her that she was aware of his approach; and, as she turned round at the sound of his step, she moved a little to one side to give the gentleman room to pass.

But, in that one little moment, some mischievous fiend, perhaps the very one which had brought Lord Penzance down to Deymont, had whispered to him that he was standing in the presence of a rare gem of beauty. He had time even in that moment to notice that she was unhappy, for there were signs of

tears floating in her eyes, which made those eyes even more lovely than ever; and her sorrow—I will not say that he did not pity it—but it gave him hope.

“My poor girl,” he began, in as kind a tone as he could conjure up, “what, crying? What’s the matter?”

She looked up, for it was kindly said, and smiled in her tears,—but she could only manage to gurgle out,

“Oh! sir; oh! sir.”

“Well, my pretty wench, I can’t help you if you won’t tell me how. Come, let’s hear all about it,” and he put his arm round her waist and was going to draw her towards him, while he leaned his head down to snatch a kiss from the tempter’s lips.

The girl hardly seemed at first to be aware of what he was doing; but it was only for a moment that she stood passively before him, and then, placing her hand on the top bar of the stile, she vaulted over as lightly and easily as

if it was her daily practice ; and as she stood at the other side with her eyes flashing, and her nostril swelling, there were no traces of her smile, no traces of her tears,

“If I let you kiss me, how could I ever see Jim again?—Nay! nay! there are scores of fine ladies, I’ll be bound;—but I’m Jim’s Mary, and no one dares touch Mary Powell.”

“Well but, Mary, I did not mean to hurt you,—you seemed so unhappy, I wished to please you ; but who’s Jim, and why isn’t he here to comfort you himself?”

“Oh! sir, he didn’t do it, indeed he didn’t do it!”

“Do what—didn’t do what?”

“Oh, he didn’t kill him, sir,—indeed I’m sure he didn’t. Jim would never kill anyone, but they all hate him, because he’s so much stronger and handsomer than them all; because I like him and won’t like them.”

Lord Penzance’s face was a study during all

this sentence. The truth was gradually breaking upon him, and he said,

“Then this Jim of yours they have taken up for killing Lord Sturdith?”

“Oh, but sir, he didn’t do it!—Indeed, indeed, he didn’t do it!”

So subtly does the devil work, that I believe that at that moment he was busy persuading Penzance that the work to which he was urging him on was a work of Christian charity. Be that as it may, there was a kindness in Lord Penzance’s tone which, to say the least, was unusual, as he answered,

“Well but, Mary, this may be all so; but it is no use your simply telling me.”

“But, sir, what am I to do?” sobbed the poor girl.

“This lover of yours—have they taken him up?”

“Oh, they came, sir, and took him away from me—and they will kill him; and that will kill me—and indeed he didn’t do it.”

“But if he did not do it, they will not kill him. He will soon be out again, and with you.”

“No, sir, that will not be, I know, because they hate him for killing their game; and so they’ll keep him locked up and I shall never see him again.”

And the poor girl pressed her hands against her face and sobbed aloud.

At that moment, could he have seen them, there were two angels hovering over his lordship’s head. The one was a fair and pleasant girl gracefully floating above him, but wearing an anxious, sorrowing expression on her young lovely face. She was whispering to him,—and his conscience felt her words,—that those tears which yon poor girl was shedding were dropping in too holy a cause to be turned by him in aid of his base mean desire. But how could she, that poor weak angel, resist the fiend who was pushing her away from his ear. That fiend, that other angel,

was a woman too, and she had that bold vaunting beauty about her which you may see in some poor unhappy women who have sacrificed everything for a short wild revel of shame; and she came with no gentle whisper, but with a loud outspoken tongue, telling him that the girl was fair, fairer than any whom he had seen before. That if she did marry her gipsy lover, what would her life be, compared to what he might make it. That if—but I will not sully my pages with the temptations which she used—with the eloquence she conjured up to win her cruel cause.

“There was war,” we read in the Apocalypse, “in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon was cast out.” Two of the greatest masters that ever lived selected this overthrow of the dragon for the subject of a picture. Each has treated the subject in the same way; each has made Michael trium-

phant, but clearly not triumphant from bodily strength. In each of these pictures Satan is an embodiment of muscular power, a prostrate, conquered Hercules; and in each the victorious Michael is a delicate, almost effeminate figure, hardly strong enough, to judge from appearances, to prevent the Devil he has overthrown from rising again; and it is, I presume, from this idea having been even more clearly worked out by Guido than Raphael, that the painting of the former master won from no mean authority the name of "the Catholic Apollo." For my part, I think that no one can stand in the Capuccini before the picture without gaining a clearer knowledge of the meaning of the words that Satan was overcome "by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony."

Raphael and Guido painted an answer to the beautiful old prayer, "God defend the right!" In the days of Raphael, indeed, men had not given over judging the justice

of the cause by its success. The reasoning which had elevated the ordeal by battle to the dignity of a trial, and of a trial in which God himself was to be judge, had not entirely relaxed its hold upon men's minds. Even in our own time, Napoleon's epigrammatic saying, that he found that Providence was on the side of the strongest battalions, was quoted as a proof of Napoleon's unbelief. Yet, though, some might hesitate to say so from reverence, there can be few, now, who would not admit that might in war is of a deal more use than a righteous cause.

I have been led into this long digression by my mention of the struggle between Lord Penzance's good and bad angels; and because in this instance might triumphed over right, and Lord Penzance's bad angel prevailed.

And yet, unfeeling as Lord Penzance for years had been, so uncertain was the conquest

at first, that his words came in a doubting, hesitating manner, as if he half wished them unsaid as they were uttered.

“ But have you done nothing to save him, then? Your tears alone will be of no use, you know.”

She looked up, as he said it, in a wild scared way,

“ But what should I do, sir? What can I do ?”

Again he hesitated, and the angel bent down and whispered that it would be charitable to suggest it; and he spoke out then, in a low voice,

“ You should get a lawyer to defend him—a very clever lawyer—he would be sure to save him.”

She came nearer to him and placed her hand on his arm; she was all trust,—and then she raised her eyes to his, and even smiled. But the smile vanished as another thought came—a thought which her speech expressed,

"But how can I find a lawyer, sir? I know no lawyer, and no one would help a poor weak girl like me "

She stopped, and then she added,

"But perhaps, sir, you are a lawyer? Oh, sir, if you are, you will save Jim, won't you? God will bless you, sir, if you will help poor Jim."

He could hardly help smiling, even then, at the notion of his being a lawyer; but he answered, very gravely and very slowly,

"No, Mary, I am not a lawyer; but I know a lawyer, a very clever man, who I think could save Jim,—only he lives a long way from here."

The girl brightened up,

"And, sir, you will send for him or write for him. I know you will—he will come for you. You will send for him, won't you, sir?"

"He wouldn't, I'm afraid, come for that, Mary; no, no! you must come with me, and

I will take you to him; and, if you tell your story to him as well as you have told it me, you will win him to come."

"But, sir, he lives a long way off, you say, and how can I go a long way with a great gentleman like you? What would Jim say?"

"Very well, Mary," Lord Penzance answered, as he made a pretence of turning to go, "of course that is for you to settle. It is rather hard on Jim, though, as I suppose he must die."

Every atom of blood left the poor girl's face; but she answered, in a very calm, quiet voice,

"I will go with you, sir. You are not deceiving me, are you?"

"No, Mary; never fear; but, if you go, we must go at once. We can catch the train to London, and we shall then be back here early to-morrow."

She walked by his side as he retraced his steps to Hicklebury. She talked to him of

Jim, and of his many feats. Spoke to him fearlessly of all the poaching that her lover had been guilty of. Then she let out, little by little, the story of her long attachment to him. How, when a boy of ten, and she but seven, Jim had thrashed another boy three years his senior, and taller by as many inches, for teasing her. How he had climbed, a year later on, the big elm in the middle of the park, because she had wanted an egg out of the wood pigeon's nest. How, when they had grown older, he had loved to walk with her alone. How his love for her had more than once prevented his undertaking some midnight expedition; and she let out, too, how many a young fellow would be glad enough to have Jim out of their way for sake of her, and how, for this reason alone, they all hated him.

And so, as she walked on by his side, she grew more trustful, more hopeful; and so they walked on together till they came to the Hicklebury station.

There were a few minutes before the train started, and Lord Penzance left her and drew aside the guard to speak to him. She fancied that she saw him slip some silver into the guard's hand, but she paid little attention to that. It was her first railway journey; and the sight of the mighty engine screeching and puffing close to her was almost sufficient to distract her thoughts even from her grief.

Lord Penzance was not away from her many moments. Short as these moments were, she was glad to see him returning to her, for she had learned, poor girl, already to trust her new found friend.

But, just as he reached her side again, a gentleman, whose face she remembered having seen before, but at the moment could not remember where, touched him on the shoulder, and spoke to him.

The two moved off together, and she was not able to hear what they said to each other.

“Why, Penzance,” began Lawless, for it was he who had accosted his lordship, “what brings you to Hicklebury?”

“The same reason as that which makes you look so sulky, I suspect—the frost, and nothing to do.”

Lawless certainly looked grave; he frowned as if he was not overpleased with his lordship’s observation; perhaps Lord Penzance observed the frown, for he drew Lawless a little further from Mary, as he went on,

“But I’ve drawn a rare covert this morning, and bagged the prettiest face; but judge for yourself.”

Lawless just turned to glance at Mary before he answered, with a half-laugh,

“Where did you find, Penzance?”

“Oh! ’tis the veriest joke! She’s in love with the gipsy fellow that shot Sturdith, and I’m going to introduce her to a lawyer to defend this gipsy lover,”—and here his lordship laughed.

“You are going to do nothing of the sort,” answered Lawless, with an oath, that reached Mary where she was sitting, and made her start and tremble. “Not a yard do you take her!”

“Why,” answered his lordship, reddening, “you spoiling sport! I’ll be—”

I am unluckily ignorant of his lordship’s opinion of his future lot; for he looked up in the middle of his sentence and caught Lawless’ eye. I fancy that Lawless’ eye must at that moment have worn very much the same expression it did on the day when he turned those three hulking fellows I told you of in my first chapter, off the gate; for though Lord Penzance, to give him his due, was no coward, he turned pale, and stopped in the middle of his sentence; and never attempted to prevent his friend’s walking up to his pretty Mary.

“My poor girl,” began Lawless, as he reached Mary’s side, “you must not go to

London with that strange gentleman. There is no need for you to do so ; your lover's trial is over."

Mary looked up in a puzzled way, wondering where she had seen Lawless' face before, and hardly knowing whether to believe him or no.

"You must know," he went on, "this is but a beginning—this day's trial. Suppose they have found him guilty to-day. It does not follow that they will—that--that he will not afterwards be acquitted."

With her eyes full of tears, Mary asked,

"Oh ! sir, have they found the poor boy guilty?"

"I do not say that, Mary ; but they have committed him for trial."

"And so there's to be a trial—is there, sir?"

"Yes, Mary."

There was a moment's pause, and then she answered,

“But I’m thinking then, sir, that he’ll want more than ever the lawyer that gentleman spoke to me about. So, if you please, sir, I will go all the same.”

Lawless bit his lips. How strange it seemed his taking such an interest in this girl.

“You must not go with that gentleman. It is not proper for you to do so. Take my word for it.”

“But why am I to take your word any more than his?” asked Mary, sorely reluctant to distrust one whom she had fancied so kind.

It was a difficult question for Lawless to answer.

“Did you ever hear your lover talk of Captain Lawless?” he asked, at last.

The girl brightened at the name. “Yes—”

“Oh, I dare say,” said Lawless, interrupting her with the only approach to a smile that he had worn since he had been talking to

her. "Oh, I dare say that many a pheasant he's taken out of my preserves."

"No! no! sir," she cried, piteously. "No! no, indeed, sir; but are you Captain Lawless?"

"Yes, Mary; will you trust me, now?"

She rose from the bench on which she was sitting,

"I will trust you, sir; but you will tell me how to save Jim, won't you?"

He led her out of the station without answering her; just as they left it, the engine whistled, and the train started for London. He walked by her side for a couple of hundred yards without saying a single word; then he asked,

"Can you find your way to the 'Swan' by yourself, Mary?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"And you trust me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, then, go straight home. I'll promise

you I will not let them hurt a single hair of your lover's head."

He turned round abruptly, and walked back towards the station.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was late in the afternoon before the coroner's jury arrived at their verdict. But, late as it was, the police determined to move Jim that very evening to the county gaol. Jim had heard the verdict delivered with the utmost apparent indifference. Perhaps his pride stood him in good stead at that moment. Without resistance, without remonstrance, he suffered himself to be led away.

The police had a van ready, in which they took him to the Hicklebury station. Poor Mary, how little she guessed that her lover would have reached it so soon after she her-

self had left it. There was no crowd at the station ; for the good townsfolk of Hicklebury had not anticipated that Jim would have been brought thither that evening. The prisoner was safely placed in a third-class carriage, seated between two policemen, who were armed to the teeth.

In about ten minutes the train started. One of the constables, a good-natured fellow, began entering into conversation with the prisoner. Jim thanked them both for their kindness. He seemed very pleased at there being no crowd at the station, and enquired whether there were any others where the train stopped. No, it ran right through to Barwell, where the county gaol is.

If you have ever travelled by this line, you probably remember that, soon after leaving Hicklebury, you enter Heywood tunnel; and that, as soon as you have emerged from this, the land sinks rapidly, and that over this low ground the line is carried on a

long embankment, till it reaches a broad branch of the River Avon. This it crosses on a narrow bridge, and then passes on again to higher lands, and more simple engineering.

The constables were all alive while the train was in the tunnel; but Jim—so they told me, for I examined them on the subject—seemed to have fallen asleep, his head dropped on his breast, then jerked up spasmodically, as a drowsy head will, and finally fell on the good-natured constable's shoulder.

The prisoner was fast asleep, and locked up in a railway carriage. Naturally, the policemen began to think of making themselves comfortable. Possibly they grew drowsier than they were disposed to admit to me. Both of them, however, agree in one point, that, just before the train reached the Avon, Jim started to his feet, flung the good-natured constable to the other end of the carriage, knocked the other down with a blow that would have felled an ox,

and, with one mighty kick, burst the door open, and plunged unfearingly into the Avon, which they were passing over.

It was quite dark. They could hardly distinguish the splash which Jim's body made as it fell into the water. They tried to communicate with the guard and the engine driver, but they could not. Three quarters-of-an-hour elapsed before they reached Barwell—a pretty start to give so active a prisoner as the gipsy. On arriving at Barwell they telegraphed to the stations all over the country an accurate description of Jim; of his dress, his appearance, and all those little particulars which the police are so accustomed to certify to. If Jim was alive, they felt sure that he could not escape them for a week.

One point they were very particular about,—there was a fast train leaving Hicklebury for Southampton, in two hours and a half. Two policemen were specially detailed to watch

the Hicklebury station. Every passenger, however unsuspecting in his appearance, was to be closely watched; and every passenger about six feet high, with black hair, was to be most minutely examined.

Five minutes before the train started, a cab drove up to the station, with a gentleman in it. He flung the driver, as he got out, half-a-crown, and said, in a clear voice,

“Just tell the landlord I shall be here again on Wednesday. I shall want lunch at one.”

The two policemen looked at each other. They had orders to examine everyone about six feet high, and with black hair; and this man had black hair, and was about six feet high; and, absurd as it may seem, they actually followed him, and were surprised to see him, without taking a ticket, enter a first-class carriage.

One of them drew the guard aside; but the guard shook his head, and the policeman came up himself, and asked the passenger for his ticket.

"My ticket, Oh yes"—and after feeling in his pocket for a moment,

"Here it is," he said, and produced a first-class *return* ticket for Southampton.

The suspicious constable was taken aback, and was all apologies.

"I beg your pardon, sir; I am sure I beg pardon; but we had strict orders—and you have black hair, sir."

"Yes."

"No offence meant, sir; but you see, sir, there was a sharp one out, and we did not know how he might double us."

"You have done quite right, my man, I've no doubt. Stay, here's my card, you may like to satisfy yourself still more," and he handed the policeman a card, just as the train whistled and moved out of the station. The card bore these words:—

Mr. Thomas Jones, junior,
Southampton.

Mr. Thomas Jones asked his way to a

marine store shop, when he reached Southampton, where he swopped the clothes he had on for a sailor's out-fit, and then, happily hitting on a ship just sailing, and short of men, flung his little bundle on board, and in two hours was slipping fast away from his native land, as fast as wind and tide could bear him.

Just about the same time, a labouring man was hurrying along a lonely, quiet lane, a few miles from Barwell. He was whistling a merry tune to himself; but he stopped in the middle of a bar, for he fancied that he heard a low groan. He stood still; the groan was repeated. There was a little copse on the left, and from thence the groaning seemed to come; thither he made the best of his way.

His two arms stretched round a tree, just too large for him to span, and his wrists tied so tightly together that it was impossible for him to extricate himself, he found a man

from whom the groans which had attracted him had proceeded.

He was dressed in a rough working suit, which looked as if it had been recently drenched through and through. He had no boots on his feet and no hat on his head. Never was there a more pitiable object than this man in his present state.

The good-natured peasant went up to him and cut the ropes which bound his wrists so cruelly together ; but the man fell down, stiff and numbed, on the ground, and the peasant had to carry him for the best part of a mile to a neighbouring farm.

The farmer's wife put the poor fellow into bed, and made some hot broth to tempt him with while they were waiting for the doctor ; but it was not until the doctor had come, and that warmth had begun to call back some small remnant of life, that they thought of despatching a messenger for the police.

But by the time the police had arrived the

fellow had so far recovered that he was able to give a tolerably clear account of himself. He had come that day from Southampton to visit an aunt who lived three miles from Hicklebury. He had intended to return to Southampton by the night express, and had actually reached the lonely lane near which he had been found, when he had been stopped by a man in drenching wet garments, who had threatened to kill him if he uttered a cry. He had shown fight at first ; but the fellow had thrown him as easily as a man could throw a child, and had then forced him to change his clothes for the wet, dripping garments which his assailant had taken off. And yet strange to say the fellow was not a regular thief,—he had returned to him all his money except a few shillings, and all his property, except his return ticket to Southampton, and, when he had bound him to a tree in the cruel position in which he had been found, he had begged his pardon so civilly and repeatedly

that his victim was more inclined to forget than be angry. No wonder, then, when the police told him by whom he had been attacked, Mr. Jones answered, "It may have been by Jim, the Gipsy, but I will never believe,—no, not till I hear it from his own lips,—that the man who attacked me was a murderer."

Perhaps the reader may be sufficiently interested in this story to care to hear that when Mr. Jones reached his home at Southampton, he found a note waiting for him from poor Jim, the Gipsy, expressing his sorrow, begging his pardon, and telling him where he had pawned his clothes; and perhaps it may be equally interesting to know that Jim got safe away, and so the police shrugged their shoulders, and the Press howled over the murderer's escape.

Moreover, I hope that my readers will care to hear one word more of Mary Powell. Poor girl, she was very unhappy at first, but the next day she got a hasty line which for years

and years after never left her bosom, save when she took it out to read it over again or bathe it with her tears; and I hope that I have not told my tale so ill that my reader will not guess from whom that little leave-taking note had come. Nay, but it was more than a farewell note, for it bade her look forward to five years later on. He would be back then, he told her, back again to see his dear own Mary, and all would go well then—that he was confident of; aye, it was as clear as the lines in his hand.

And so Mary waited patiently. May I dare compare my creation to Viola?—and the police waited hoping, debating, wondering.

Were I wise I should perhaps finish the first part of my story with this mention of Mary.

But at the risk of tiring my reader, if I have not done so already, I must introduce him to one more scene before I drop the curtain, for more than a year will have passed

before it is raised, and it will then be only raised for a moment.

A fine, bright winter morning in January.

On that sunny terrace walk, down which, when we were last there, we saw Sturdith and Marion strolling together towards Hilton Wood—on that sunny terrace Lord Deymont, terribly altered, is sitting in his Bath chair.

Lady Clementina and Guy, both dressed in the deepest morning, alone are with him.

“And so, Guy,” said the old man, for I must call him an old man now, “Muchmull never went to the poll after all,”

“No, uncle,” said Guy, and he tried to speak cheerfully,—“he saw that he had no chance. Your name had more weight than all his promises.”

“Yet,” said Clementina, “he seemed like fighting at first, didn’t he?”

“Oh, you would have laughed, uncle, if you could have heard the speech he made at Hicklebury. Every good thing that the

country ever had was due to the Reform Bill. Education, Repeal of the Navigation Laws, Free-trade,—and so forsooth, for he made a ‘so’ of it, though for the life of me I can’t see the sequence,—it was the duty of every man to have a new Reform Bill to supersede the old one.”

“But you said he promised, Guy,” replied Clementina, who saw that her poor father, for the first time since Sturdith’s death, was taking an interest in the conversation.

“Promised! Clementina, there was nothing that he didn’t promise. We were to begin by wiping off the National Debt, held by the rich landowners who, it seems, are the curse of the country. To effect this, it will probably, he thinks, be necessary to extinguish the peerage, which is an anomaly and indefensible. The established church follows as a matter of course, and the poor, who, it appears, are now ground down with taxation,

are for the first time to be emancipated. Taxation is to be borne by the rich, especially by the landowning rich, and Mr. Muchmull is to inaugurate, as Prime Minister, an era, in which poverty is to cease and poor laws to be forgotten, because there are no poor."

"And what," said the old Earl, "did you tell them, Guy?"

"Oh, very little, uncle. I told them that after all it seemed to me that the Conservatives had done pretty nearly as well as the Whigs—that Pitt, Wellington, and Peel were Conservatives, and that to them some share in the credit of emancipating the Catholics and repealing the Corn Laws was due, and that D'Israeli's budget, though he had gone out on it, was a better one than most that had preceded it. And then, uncle,—for all this you know was only a reply—I thought it best to go straight to the point, and so I told them that I was your nephew,"—Guy's voice

trembled,—“and that I came there among them at your bidding, and because I knew that they trusted you, and because I intended, by God’s help, to do my duty towards them, as my poor cousin Sturdith had done his before me, in a way that would not shame the good old Deymont blood that runs in my veins. And, uncle, had you heard the cheer that they all raised then, you’d have known that they’re all as proud of the old blood as we are, and that though there were a million of Muchmulls they would never be able to do away with the peerage of England.”

“God bless thee, Guy,” was all the old earl said, but a tear rolled down his withered cheek which his powerless arm was unable to wipe away, and Guy wheeled him on, Clementina at his side, along the terrace walk.

All along that terrace walk and back again, without a word from any one of the three.

Guy stopped again in the bright sunlight and the old peer addressed his nephew,

“They’ve heard no more of the gipsy, Guy?”

It was spoken interrogatively, and it was the very first time Lord Deymont had ever alluded to the murder. “They think, uncle,” said Guy, “that he sailed to America, but it is but guess work. We haven’t much chance of catching him now.”

The old man said nothing for a few moments, but Guy saw that his poor paralysed hands were twitching uneasily. “I’m glad of it,” he said at last.

“Yes,” he said, “I’m glad of it—it wouldn’t give us your poor brother back again, Clementina; and perhaps, if he lives, he may learn to be sorry for what he has done.”

Again there was a pause, and again it was the old peer who spoke first. “Guy,” he

said, "is it true that the fellow was in love with some poor girl?"

"Yes;" it was Clementina who answered her father; "the daughter of the landlord of a little inn on the road to Sturdith."

"Poor girl," said the old earl, "what's become of her, Clementina?"

"She's been terribly shocked, the servants tell me," Lady Clementina replied; "and she is so pretty. Do you remember, uncle, the girl whose beauty we all so admired at the sports in the park?"

The old earl did not remember, or perhaps, did not hear his daughter's question; for he gave no answer to it. He was silent for a few moments, and then he said. "It wasn't her fault, Guy, and you mustn't let her suffer for it; but don't let her know that anything you give her comes from this house. Mayhap her pride wouldn't like to take a favour from us."

Can I end my first part better than with the

old earl's charitable speech. Fall, then, the curtain on the first act of my history.

Cry you, "Hold enough," or will you wander on into another part.

END OF VOL. I.

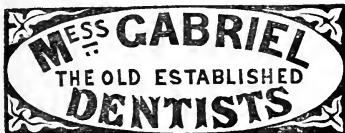


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